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Making Home: (re)collections of objects in painting and textiles

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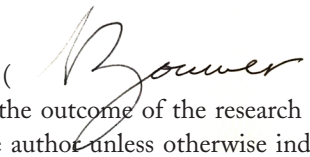
Declaration of Originality

I, Naomi Zouwer () hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

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Abstract

My PhD research draws on the traditions of still life painting and domestic embroidery to explore the relationship of family keepsakes to ideas of time, memory and migration stories. Through a range of speculative studio processes I have examined how seemingly trivial objects and curios can simultaneously connect to both past and present. Focusing on re-contextualising objects from three generations of my migrant family's archive I have aimed to create a visual narrative, which moves from a sense of loss and nostalgia, and through the processes of retelling and re-presenting in painting and textile, to the present time where specific migration stories have become my own. Through connecting the research to broader theory such as Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopic space, I identify the potent role that visual retelling, or re-presenting stories has in creating a compression of space and time.

My practice-led research methods involved working with painting and textiles techniques, in combination and independently, and my work oscillated between two-dimensional and three-dimensional space over the duration of the PhD program. I experimented with cutting out painted objects from oil paintings and presenting them as floating free from the artistic conventions of a background or setting. I made embroideries of people and objects and explored the use of absurd scale and unexpected combinations of objects and people. I developed a digital archive of over 300 objects from my collection, which grew to include special objects from my own and my children's day to day lives. I made portraits of people through their objects, three towers made from reclaimed domestic embroidery, and a constellation of painted objects that combined the past with the present and reflected my hybrid practice and hybrid culture.

My research presents an original contribution to knowledge through a body of studio practice, which establishes the unlimited potential of new stories to be told in relation to the objects and the ways visual practice contributes to personal narratives of past, present and future. I find that I can combine the past with the present to create new objects made from painting and textiles, that are forward looking and optimistic.

Keywords

Archive, collections, cultural hybridity, discontinuous, dislocation, disruption, fragments, heterotopia, heritage, identity, knowledge, memory, migrant, narrative nostalgia, objects, order, painting, recuperate, resuscitate, retrieval, rhopography, still life, taxonomy, textiles, third space.

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Mars Lumograph
but adore your voice it's just divine!
DŮVOD PRO ZÁPALKY
E-Z Lettering Service
YEAR 1962
MAKE MG
BODY ROADSTER
COLOR BLUE
don't you want me baby ?

Prologue

Object 1 The Dutch interior

Obj. 1 Naomi Zouwer, *Blue and white clogs*

Before my paternal grandparents migrated to Australia from Holland in the 1950s, they did not know what to expect and had all their teeth taken out. They thought it a smart move in case Australia didn't have any dentists. On arrival, they went straight from Sydney to Bonegilla Migrant Hostel, outside Albury. Five people with very few belongings were in a small room, and they shared facilities with 5000 other migrants for the months before they moved to Canberra. If you visit Bonegilla today, in one of the long-houses is a photo of a man I suspect may be my grandfather, Opa, playing the accordion.

My grandparents moved to Lyons in Canberra. It was a strange place for me to visit as a kid. On the front lawn, a massive wooden wagon was the main feature of their sculpted and organised 1970s garden. The concrete path led past the wagon to the front door and an empty pair of 'show clogs'. The clogs were the souvenir kind, almost too large, but in fact were probably my grandmother's size. She had such big feet she needed to have women's shoes sent from Holland or to wear men's shoes. The clogs were wooden and painted on the top of each was a windmill set in the Dutch countryside and the word 'Holland' written in a curly font. To me, the wagon and the clogs communicated pride in Dutch heritage, and I drew parallels with their house and the Australian colonial past.

On entering their home, the strong smells struck me first. A concoction of tobacco smoke, babies' nappies, 4.7.11 perfume (Eau de Cologne) and stewing meat. My Opa smoked constantly. Most of the family smoked—it was a 70s thing. My grandmother, Oma, ran a family day-care. Among her novel child-care dos and don'ts was spraying babies' heads with 4.7.11 perfume. I don't know why, because babies' heads smell so good! The stewing

meat was a typical Dutch dinner—steak cooked all day served with 'oil of meat', which in Dutch is called 'jus' and pronounced 'shoe'. You pour the jus over potatoes that have been boiled until they are floury and have lost their flavour. The greens were canned and then cooked some more until transparent and soggy. I had a little ritual. After the bus, at the underpass, I would take off my bold accessories and put on my gold windmill necklace and the acrylic jumper Oma had hand-knitted for me. Because I'd starved myself all day at school so I could stomach the food, my tummy would be rumbling from hunger by the time I got to the house. However, sometimes this backfired. I was famished and would slurp the food down so fast that I couldn't taste it, and then they would give me a second helping!

At least Oma made delicious cakes, and they were something to look forward to. The family watched a lot of television before and during the meals. Favourites during the 80s Sale of the Century and Perfect Match. The television took up a large part of the lounge room. My Opa was a handyman, and had made a special shelf where it sat among all their other objects. The far wall was covered with brick-patterned wallpaper. On that wall hung an ornate cuckoo clock with heavy brass acorn weights dangling below it.

My Opa was a painter too. His paintings included Australian draught horses and carts, Amsterdam street scenes, a few portraits and a copy of Rembrandt's self-portrait. I also remember another of a little boy with a tear rolling down his cheek. At least I think he had a tear. Anyway, that was his best painting. Opa loved Rembrandt. He took me to the Rijksmuseum when I was 14. We stood in front of Nachtwacht, and he said in his thick Dutch accent, "Now that's a painter! He could really paint. Not like that Van Gogh. He was crazy! Just look at all the colours!" Opa really liked brown. Everything that was not already made of dark wood was painted mission brown. I think that was one reason he liked Rembrandt—so much raw umber. Everything in Oma and Opa's backyard was painted brown, including the kids swings and tricycles. Apparently, this meant that even when everything was lying around it still appeared to be neat.

Opa loved blacksmithing. He bought his anvil at an auction in Sydney when they first arrived in Australia. He could have bought a house in Sydney, but he bought the anvil instead. They didn't own a house in the whole time they lived in Australia, but he made a lot of ironwork. The house was full of it. In the lounge and dining rooms were iron lampshades made of horseshoes welded together. Oma had made a red and white gingham ruched material shade to fit. They liked to do things together, and they were really mad about each other. Oma and Opa sang songs together—Opa on harmonica, Oma on the clicking sticks (which she called the 'clackers').

I also remember the Delft blue objects at the Lyons house. Scattered throughout the rooms were innumerable blue and white clogs and Dutch kids kissing. On the wall, were copper plates embossed with scenes of people eating or shoeing horses next to ceramic tiles set in curly iron frames. I liked to sit in front of the fake fireplace and play with the bellows that hung next to it. The lounge room had so many fakes: the fire, bricks, paintings, Delft blue. But it didn't matter to my grandparents. They had reconstructed a pretty convincing Dutch interior. They had remade their homeland domestic space to raise their children in. They were proud to be Australian and Dutch and expressed this through their objects and their home decoration. Now, years on, I have a few of their objects, including photos of Oma and Opa and their young family from optimistic times—and I am trying to understand my heritage through these objects. They spent their life making things so they could construct a Dutch–Australian home and identity. Now I am trying to reconstruct some of these elements to put into my work and to acknowledge their contribution to my own narrative of belonging. At the same time, I want to take into account my mother's Finnish heritage and my Chinese stepfather's impact on my world ... but that's another story.

Introduction

I am a first generation Australian, my father was from the Netherlands and my mother from Finland, and my stepfather who raised me was of Chinese descent. It is the objects from their collections and their parents' homes that have helped me make sense of my cultural hybridity, heritage and identity. In this research project I have interrogated a selection of these objects, as subject matter for my art practice, which employs a variety of painting and textiles techniques. I find that seemingly trivial objects are conduits to understanding how we belong and connect to the past and the present. I found I could combine the past with the present to create new objects that were forward looking and optimistic. An unexpected outcome of this project was that I discovered I was able to create a sense of integration with my childhood and present experiences.

The objects I chose to depict belong to my family and come from Finland, the Netherlands, and my extended Chinese stepfamily, my children and husband and me. As my project developed my selection grew to include a wider variety of anonymously owned things found in opportunity shops to provide a context for my existing objects. The common connection was that they were domestic objects, ordinary things, often not perfect but they reflected my world and related to my personal narrative of belonging to some extent. I treated them all in an egalitarian way and with a respectful attitude to raise their importance and highlight their character and charm.

Objects are important to how people construct their identity and represent themselves to others. Writer and photographer Svetlana Boym suggests that the souvenirs or keepsakes migrants surround themselves with are "transitional objects that reflect multiple belonging".[1] People find comfort in objects, especially familiar things, when they find themselves living in a strange land. With this in mind, I framed my research to ask: how can painting and textile techniques be used to examine the social role of small domestic objects and their ability to tell stories of belonging and migration? As the project progressed, my practice and research coalesced, drawing upon concepts such as Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopic space and Homi Bhabha's writings on third space as theoretical frameworks for the studio work.[2]

I adopted a practice-led approach to conduct my research. I began my project examining the collection of familial objects I had brought together in my personal cabinet of curiosities or "memory museum," as Svetlana Boym calls collections of objects that adorn migrant homes.[3] My research methods involved working with painting and textiles techniques in combination, and independently, and my work oscillated between two-dimensional and three-dimensional space over the duration of the PhD program.

As well as drawing my methods included: traditional still life painting techniques using oil paint on canvas but then cutting the painted object out of its background and sewing it into a three-dimensional form to make soft sculptures; painting with thread to make small-scale embroideries of people juxtaposed with unrealistically proportioned objects; creating a blog to depict and categorise my familial objects; making paper objects from watercolour paintings; cutting out reclaimed embroideries to make silhouette portraits of family; painting textile patterns of textures within silhouettes of objects; combining small objects with tapestry weaving techniques; sewing numerous doilies and tablecloths together to create a collection of three towers; painting small palm-sized objects organised on grids and polar grid patterns to create portraits of people and places; publishing an illustrated series of small encyclopaedias of my objects; and, finally, creating a large constellation of oil paintings of objects organised in the pattern of a doily.

1 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, Basic Books, 2001), 336.

2 Heterotopic space is a space where unexpected combinations occur. In the literature review I explain the six principles that define a Heterotopic space according to Foucault.

3 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 331.

In contemporary practice, I locate my research in the field of artists who work with inherited and found objects to retell stories of history and reshape personal and collective identity, notably, Tony Albert and Patrick Pound. Also relevant was David Watt, and international artists Ismo Kajander, Daniel Spoerri, Ilya Kabakof and photographer Paula Zuccotti. All have unique approaches to working with collections of objects for artistic outcomes. Another important reference was the exhibition *Open House: Textiles Triennial 2017*, curated by Glenn Barkley, and the work of two artists in particular who both use embroidery: Raquel Ormella approaches embroidery with a painting sensiblity and uses found colour palettes, and Joy Ivill takes a narrative approach to image making.

Within the historical field, I situate my practice in the tradition of still life painting, especially rhopography, which art historian Norman Bryson articulates is, "the depiction of those things which lack importance, the unassuming material base of life that 'importance' constantly overlooks".[4] Seventeenth century Dutch *vanitas* still life painting that employed symbolic objects to make paintings that speak of the transience of life and mortality or simple domestic pleasures was another important reference point.

I begin the exegesis with an overview of my practice-led research methodology and methods used to conduct the project. To establish the key ideas underpinning my research I follow with a literature review and then I chronologically discuss my practice-led research. In Chapter 2, I explore the attraction of family migration objects and ways of retelling stories. Chapter 3 discusses how my project evolves into a desire to find meaning and understand relationships between people and between people and things. I become aware of the compression of time and space that occurs when different objects come together and how this affects my work. In Chapter 4, I address the realisation that I am editing and curating my life through my choice of objects and that I am giving objects a new existence, honouring them, making them equal and connecting them. And, finally, in the last year of my candidature outlined in Chapter 5, I explain how I arrive at a point where the studio practice demonstrates how the telling and retelling of the objects' stories – in this case in visual form – allow longing and loss to be recuperated. As part of my methods each chapter incorporates personal object stories that mirror my journey, which moves from reflecting on the past to the present.

In the literature review, I situate my practice-led research within the field of object studies, with reference to current object-oriented ontology[5] and subject-oriented theories. My study focuses on small domestic objects that are part of my daily life. They are a mixture of functional and non-functional items; precious in terms of memories, they are keepsakes, souvenirs, some are whole and some just fragments. Mine is not a project about valuable or rare collections, the art of collecting or museological practices, but is about creating personal memory museums that deal with the migrant experience. In relation to this I discuss Homi Bhabha and Edward Soja's notions of third space and how as a first generation Australian and artist these theories informed my practice.[6]

In Chapter 2, my first year in the studio, I begin by exploring the capabilities of objects to tell stories using painting and textiles techniques. In the first year of studio experiments I was asking: Can juxtaposing unexpected objects change their individual and collective meaning and create new "heterotopic" spaces and consequently new narratives and new interpretative possibilities?[7] How can Foucault's notion of heterotopic space aid

4 Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked, Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London, Reaktion books, 1990), 61.

5 Theorist Graham Harman coined the term object-oriented ontology in *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (USA: Carus Publishing, 2002). Harman's view is object centred rather than human centred which is pertinent to my project as I attempt to draw stories out of objects.

6 Third space is a postcolonial concept defined by Bhabha that explains how cultural hybridity is created when different cultures overlap. Soja views 'thirdspace' from the perspective of a cultural geographer as a space where spatiality, historicality and sociality are considered equally to create spatial awareness.

7 Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,* Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité. October, 1984; ("Des Espace Autres," March 1967 Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec)

in illuminating narratives? How can systems like encyclopaedias and taxonomies help to create works of art? And, how can I animate still life? One of the research methods employed to address these questions included a blog to allow the depiction, description and varying categorization of objects from my family 'archive' and, later from an extended object collection.

Taxonomies were examined as a device to organise and combine disparate objects into a system I could use for painting and textile works to draw stories out of objects. This system also allowed me to view groups of objects in terms of heterotopic space, which provided more layers of meaning and potential for different readings. I became aware that I could mobilise objects by cutting away the background. As a result my focus shifted from trying to animate still life to animating objects and family stories. The most significant discovery, however, was that I realised my role in my family was the memory keeper. I was the guardian of the stories and, through my art practice, I was making sense of experiences of migration and dislocation associated with my family.

Chapter 3 recounts my search for meaning and relationships between family members and objects. I embarked on fieldwork in Finland and the Netherlands to research Dutch still life paintings, and to gain a deeper understanding of my heritage and find more stories and objects to invigorate my work. I visited numerous exhibitions and immersed myself in Finnish culture to expand my narrative of belonging. In the Netherlands, I confronted themes of transience, mortality and *memento mori* objects through analysing *vanitas* and *pronkstilleven* paintings in the Rijksmuseum. The power of the object to symbolise meaning, generate memory and evoke nostalgia was reinforced by the experience. I found in these works a compression of time and space brought about by the juxtaposition of different objects; this would become a key theme in later studio works.

In Finland, I examined the work of cross-disciplinary artist Ismo Kajander and realised that combining objects can be like combining commonly shared and personal memories. In the Netherlands I considered how painters represented objects and textiles by studying works by Henri Matisse, Pieter Claesz, Adriaen van Utrecht and others. I also examined an object, Petronella Oortman's Dolls' house, discovering that time is skewed with scale when objects are miniaturised. The lure of the miniature object also became something to explore in the studio, and I embarked on creating works from small domestic and personal objects.

In Chapter 4 I discuss works made for exhibitions between 2015 and 2017 and explain how I came to understand that I am editing and curating my life through my choice of objects. I also realised that, via illusionistic painting and the use of grids as a compositional device, I was giving objects a new existence, honouring them, making them equal and connecting them. By the end of second year, my practice became energised by engaging with a broader range of objects that included found objects from my fieldwork trip, my house, my children or objects from opportunity shops. I attempted to give the discarded objects new lives, to resuscitate them and give them a place, either as a whole or as a fragment of a greater narrative. This was a turning point I realised my project was recuperative, concerned with looking at the present and forwards, not with looking back.

In my studio practice I developed a system to organise and interpret objects from my archive. Using gouache on paper, I created portraits from tiny painted objects, fragments of objects, and my family members' objects. I arranged these items in a grid. By using a miniature scale, time and space were compressed. I became aware that the grid was not only acting as a compositional device in these paintings, but was a common element

among many of my works. The grid structure of my embroideries was mirrored in my taxonomy paintings and paintings of fabrics: glomesh, cross-stitch and in the warp and weft of the fabric. It gave the painting and textiles works cohesion.

Chapter 5 details my findings in my final year in the studio and discusses the ways in which the telling and retelling of the objects' stories – in this case in visual form – allow longing and loss to become recuperated. I develop the different directions my work took in the second year, where I had been giving objects a new existence through honouring them and making them equal, connecting them through such devices as the grid. I experimented further with compositional devices based on the early engravings of cabinets of curiosities commissioned by Albertus Seba, and domestic doily patterns from Australia from the 1930s and 1940s. I researched third space theory in relation to migration and identity. My final exhibition brought painting and textiles into conversation with each other and addressed the inevitable tensions, possibilities and resonances that arose. I produced four bodies of work: the *Taxonomy Series*, a set of mini encyclopaedias, three three-dimensional tower structures and a constellation of painted objects and textiles. This chapter also situates my practice within a contemporary art context and discusses the relevance and significance of other artists working in similar fields.

A key finding came through material experimentation when I discovered that by cutting objects away from their backgrounds, by dislocating them I could mobilise, activate and animate them to become engaging, lively storytellers of narratives of belonging. Cutting the object away from its background also served as an analogy for my migrant heritage – dislocating the object from its background parallelled my family's dislocation from their homeland in Europe when they migrated to Australia in the 1950s. Dislocated objects enabled me to explore ideas of belonging, migration, memory and nostalgia in original ways.

In summary, I found, through multiple tests and material exploration that using painting and textiles practices in combination proves useful in exploring experiences related to migration, and narratives of belonging. Throughout my investigation, objects and my connections to them were crucial. Through detailed observational painting I could elevate objects from a seemingly trivial status to one of significance. And finally, my project evolved from one concerned with a first-generation perspective on migration, which was dominated by a sense of loss, to one that is engaged in the present and looks to the future. Through the process of careful selection and integration of objects I could create a new place – what I was doing was making home.

Background to methodology and methods

Introduction

My aim was to create new and transferable knowledge through practice-led research. Central and novel to my approach was the fusing of painting and textiles practices and theories. I used exploratory and experimental methods in painting and textiles to examine the social role of small domestic objects and their ability to tell stories of belonging and migration. In this chapter I explain why I employed a practice-led research approach as the underpinning methodology for my project. I outline my methods, and explain how the adoption of a variety of techniques and a range of material explorations in painting and textiles allowed me to address my research questions. Because illusionistic painting comprises a significant portion of my practice I discuss art historians' perspectives of *trompe l'oeil* and still life painting traditions, focusing on the representation of commonplace objects and rendering of textiles. I provide a theoretical rationale as to why these conventions were pertinent to my research into representational painting of objects. I also discuss how the use of the grid as an organisational device was key to my studio enquiry across painting and textiles processes.

Research Methodology

In *Practice as Research, Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry,* Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt write that practice-led research allows revelations to occur that would not be revealed with other methods.[1] Further, "it is not just about making meaning by what we have at hand, but of making new ways of making meaning through practical invention".[2] For my PhD project I employed a practice-led research approach which, as Barrett explains, is concerned with gaining an understanding of both studio enquiry and its outcomes as process.[3] As material explorations were key to my research methods Paul Carter's writing was also relevant. Carter argues that by using material thinking, ideas become tangible through the making process. This allows for a different point of view of our 'human situation'[4], one that "critics and theorists insterested in communicating ideas about things cannot emulate…".[5] I found this approach illuminating – as a practicing artist I think with and through material investigation. The practice-led mode of enquiry was therefore a logical and productive choice.

Methods

My practice-led research methods involved working with painting and textiles techniques, both in combination and separately, and my work oscillated between two-dimensional and three-dimensional explorations during the PhD program. Specifically I:

- experimented with cutting out painted objects from oil paintings and presenting them as free floating elements, breaking with artistic conventions of integrating them in a background or setting.
- made embroideries of people and objects and explored the use of absurd scale and unexpected combinations of objects and people.
- made portraits of people through representational paintings of their objects.
- made three gigantic towers from reclaimed domestic embroidery embellished with embroidered images of my paintings of objects.
- painted a constellation of objects that combined the past with the present and reflected my hybrid practice and hybrid culture.
- developed a digital archive of objects from my collection, which grew to include special objects from my own and my children's lives.
- wrote stories about the objects to include in my archive. A selection of these stories is placed in between the chapters of the exegesis. The stories reflect the focus of my studio enquiry that moved from the past to the present.

1 Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research, Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry, (I.B Tauris, NY, 2007)* 186.
2 ibid, 191.
3 ibid.
4 Paul Carter, *Material Thinking*, Theory and Practice of Creative Research. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004). xii.
5 *Carter, ibid,* xi.

Fig. A.1 Detail of *The Unswept Floor*

Due to the nature of practice-led research the processes and their outcomes drove my research. As Barrett states, "[a] feature of studio-based enquiry is that the method unfolds through practice – *practice* is itself, productive of knowledge and engenders further practice demonstrating the emergent nature of the process". [6] With each exploration new questions were raised, directing the project in ways that I will explain throughout the exegesis.

Illusionistic painting techniques and Rhopography (trivial objects)

Art historian Jochen Sander writes that: "After its emancipation from the religious painting of the late Middle Ages, the 'still life', '*Stilleven*', and '*nature morte*' – initially served as a means of recording and interpreting the stationary objects found in the viewer's everyday surroundings".[7] *Stilleven* is the Dutch word given to the genre that was initially called rhopography, derived from *rhopros,* the Greek word meaning trifles or trivial things.[8] Rhopography is an archaic term but provides an apt description of the works I made for my project. It is the trivial things that appeal to me, and they are the objects with which I have connections, the little things that have been witness to an event, time or person in my life. Some are only fragments, but are laden with personal meaning. I attempted to raise the status of insignificant objects to objects of importance by using rhopography. I drew from my archive of objects, many of which are ordinary things, discarded by a family member, or are worn or damaged in some way.

An image which appealed to my sense of the 'precious ordinary' is the second century mosaic *trompe l'oeil* from Pompeii, *The Unswept Floor,* which depicts tiny fragments of the detritus found on the kitchen floor. This finely constructed mosaic of "domestic debris"[9] illuminates the details and enhances the beauty of the trivial things that are part of everyday life (Fig. A.1). This practice of rhopography relates to my interest in giving visual form to ideas of heterotopic space, which I will discuss in following chapters.

6 Barrett, *Practice as Research, Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry,* 9.

7 Jochen Sander, *The Magic of Things* 1st ed. (Germany, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), 13.

8 Remo Bodei, *The Life of Things, The Love of Things* 1st ed. Trans. Murtha Baca (Baltimore, Maryland, Fordham University Press, 2015), 92.

9 Celestine Dars, *Images of Deception, The art of Trompe l'oeil* (Oxford, Phaidon Press, 1979), 9.

The illusionistic painting style I chose to explore is similar to that used in *trompe l'oeil* painting.[10] I aim to paint small objects, which appear at first to be real and three-dimensional. Historian Celestine Dars suggests that, "The *trompe l'oeil* artist aims to create an illusion convincing enough to deceive the eye of the beholder by making a flat surface appear three-dimensional".[11] I apply these principles to my painting of objects, and present stories that are open to the viewers own interpretation, depending their knowledge or emotional responses to the objects I select.

I find that through the act of observational painting of my objects a greater understanding of life around me can be achieved. This relates to historian Svetlana Alpers' argument about how Dutch painters were making sense of their world through the act of illusionist painting. Alpers writes:

> To appear lifelike, a picture has to be carefully made...[a]ttentive looking, transcribed by the hand – what might be called the observational craft – led to the recording of the multitude of things that make up the visible world. In the seventeenth century this was celebrated as giving basic access to knowledge and understanding of the world.[12]

My painting of objects enhances their quality and raises their status so that they become worthy of sustained attention. Things I paint include small toys that are whole or broken, hair elastics and used sticky tape rolls. For me these items are significant because of how my children have interacted with them.

I experimented with compositional devices and installation techniques to mobilise objects and to convey narratives about migration, dislocation and domestic life. Norman Bryson and Alpers both argue that Dutch still life painting was not narrative or symbolic , it was more concerned with the portral of material culture. Bryson says, "still life is the world minus its narratives, or better, the world minus its capacity for generating narrative intent".[13] He states that "the drama of greatness – is banished"[14] from the narratives in still life. In my view, drama exists in still life but is subtler than, for example, in classic history painting and requires more imagination from the viewer. The tales still lifes tell are less gruesome than much history painting, and of course, the human figure is absent. In my portraits only peoples' objects are pictured. This absence is another reason, Bryson explains, why still life struggles to generate narrative: "...still life pitches itself at a level of material existence where nothing exceptional occurs".[15] Through my work, I establish that still life painting is capable of creating narratives, although there is no sequence of events, there are identifiable characters and implied and ambiguous storylines.

Some of the objects in my collection are textiles and include domestic embroidery, clothing, handbags, and jewellery. These are transitional objects that connect me to memories of family and of myself in the past. Textile artist and researcher Solveigh Goett claims that our connection to textile objects often dates from a pre-verbal era. She writes that, textiles "linger as sensory memory in collective consciousness, and perhaps ever since not only our bodies and environments, but also our memories, thoughts and theories have been clothed".[16] My collection of textiles includes especially potent objects that embody my memories. For example, a kimono my mother used to wear and my grandmother's glomesh handbag are strong signifiers for me of people and events.

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10 The term *trompe l'oeil* comes from the French 'deception of the eye'. *Trompe l'oeil* paintings can be traced back to antiquity, Pliny the Elder (AD 23 - 79) writes of competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasios two famous Ancient Greek painters. Zeuxis was said to have painted a bunch of grapes, so realistically that birds tried to eat them. But Zeuxis was fooled by a painting of a curtain so realistic that he asked Parrhasios to draw it back.

11 Celestine Dars, *Images of Deception, The art of the trome l'oeil,* (Oxford, Phaidon Press, 1979),7.

12 Svetlana Alpers, The art of describing. 1st ed. (Chicago, The Unversity Press, 2009), 72.

13 Norman Bryson, Looking at the Overlooked, *Four essays on Still Life Painting*. (London: Reaktion books, 1990).

14 ibid, 60.

15 ibid, 61.

16 Solveigh Goett, "Material, memories and metaphors" in The Handbook of Textile culture, ed. Jefferies, Janis, Wood Conroy, Diana and Clark, Hazel (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 166.

Working with my textile objects involved an investigation into the ways textiles are represented in paint. Early Dutch painters had a reputation as excellent painters of fabrics, able to convincingly render different textures of silk, wool and linen through skilful brushwork. I examined their achievements first-hand on my fieldwork. An exquisite example is *Girl in Red Kimono,* 1894 (Fig. A.2) by George Hendrik Breitner, that I saw at the Steidlijk Museum in Amsterdam.

In the studio I experimented with painting textiles. For the *Lineage Series* I filled forms of domestic objects, such as beer steins and milk jugs with painted textile patterns based on clothes that had sentimental value to me. In later works, *The Under Glow*, I filled shapes with similar textile patterns and juxtaposed them with paintings of small objects.

Part of my research considered the portrayal of identity. The portrayal of identity through the exploration of historic paintings and representations of textiles is discussed by Marcia Pointon in *Portrayal and the search for identity*.[17] She proposes "that the historical meanings of portraits and the work they did in constructing masculine identities, and the ideas of what it was to be male, may be better apprehended by ignoring faces and attending to other parts of the body and to the ways in which those body parts are covered or adorned".[18]

In the *Taxonomy Series* (Fig. A.3), there are no body parts or facial features, only collections of objects that belong to the subject of the painting.

Fig.A.2
George Hendrik Breitner,
Girl in Red Kimono

17 Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the search for identity*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2013)
18 Pointon, *Portrayal and the search for identity*, 21.

Fig.A.3 *Taxonomy Series*, 2015-2018

The grid

In textiles, the grid is created by the warp and weft structure of threads that are woven together to make the material. In my painting and textile works the grid provided a unifying element. For example, a grid of stitching formed the basis of the three six-metre towers I constructed from doilies. In my paintings, I based my composition on grids. The *Taxonomy Series* uses two grid systems; in one I aligned my objects in columns and rows to form a grid, and in the other, I placed my painted objects over polar grid patterns found in doilies. For my constellation of oil paintings, *The Under Glow*, I constructed individual pieces that I painted objects onto and organised on the wall over a polar grid of a doily. This was partly inspired by Albertus Seba's folios of illustrated objects from his natural history collection of specimens.

Rosalind Krauss and Hannah Higgins have written seminal works on the grid, which are important for understanding this aspect of my work. Krauss states that the grid is the emblem of modernity and more pertinently that: "There are two ways in which the modern grid functions… One is spatial; the other is temporal".[19] She argues for the grid to be seen as an agent of control and repression.[20] While I recognise the influence Krauss' essay has had within art theory and art practice, my project has a different emphasis. I do use the grid as a device to control and create ordered compositions, and as an agent of equivalence. It allows different kinds of representational objects to be presented in a compositional field without a hierarchy. But the grid also allows me to bring into the one picture plane objects from my multicultural background, together with selected and found objects from my present.

Higgins examines a range of manifestations of the grid and the systems of logic they imply. She positions the grid as a mutable, more inclusive structure "of making and unmaking, connecting to other grids and disconnecting from them".[21] In a discussion of textile netting she contends that grids should be seen as sites "forming a pliable grid of squared spaces that can be used to snare fish or fowl or hold things like groceries and hairdos. By definition, what a net contains is larger than the spaces of its grid".[22] This latter idea appealed to me because the grids I used to contain my objects often allowed unexpected associations and connections to be realised, and for stories to be told that were larger than the objects.

Conclusion

In summary, I elected practice-led research as a methodology to reveal what other modes could not in the production of a body of creative work. It allowed me to be experimental in my approach to material exploration and aligned to my thinking with and through materials and processes, specifically in painting and textiles.

The following literature review dicusses the theories that informed my studio enquiry, including object theories, and theories pertaining to social space. I also explain how knowledge systems were relevant to my material investigations and process.

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19 Rosalind Krauss, "Grids", October, Volume 9 (summer 1979): 50-64.
20 ibid, 55.
21 Hannah Higgins, *The Grid Book*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 277.
22 ibid, 235.

My studio 2017

Object 2 Monkey coral

My father left Australia in a hurry when I was seven. It was 1979. He and my mother had been separated since I was two. When he left, the objects he had given me up to this point became super important, and the things that he would give me after this date would prove to be even more significant. I remember receiving a parcel in the post from his first stop, which was Thailand. It was a stinky package and when I opened it, crumbled pieces of brown monkey coral fell out. They were wrapped in metres of red raw Thai silk along with a heavy little ivory statue of Buddha sitting cross-legged and laughing. I loved these things, even the smelly coral. I carted that Thai silk with me from house to house (I moved a lot - by 35 I had lived in 35 houses). It stained my white washing pink, and the silk became frayed around the edges, and sometimes, long strings of silk would get caught up and tangled in something else. I painted the Buddha with bright acrylic paints when I was 10, and years later I felt bad about doing that, and I tried to scrub it clean, but you can still see traces of paint. Eventually, I had to throw out the coral, and maybe that's why ephemeral objects from nature don't interest me as much.

I didn't see my father again until I was 14. When I did, he gave me a tiny gold clog pendant on a very delicate gold chain to wear around my neck. I didn't like gold as a teenager. He had given me a gold watch for my fourth birthday along with a pair of golden mushroom earrings that I had loved, but my taste had changed. It turned out we had very different taste in jewellery; he liked ornate Italian gold pieces, and I liked rustic tribal silver from India. On one of my visits to Amsterdam he bought me a pencil case in the shape of a fish, it was made of rubber and collected dust like sticky tape. I could barely stand to touch it, but I loved that pencil case because it represented something we had in common – we both like this pencil case and we liked unusual things.

Obj. 2 Naomi Zouwer, *Buddha statue and red Thai silk*

1 Literature review

Introduction

In my research into the field of object studies I aimed to understand why objects motivate me the way they do and how things have shaped my identity and sense of belonging as a first generation Australian of migrant parents.

The following chapter discusses the object theories I engaged with during my project and ideas of other social spaces including third space and heterotopic spaces where objects and cultures overlap and intersect to create a new phenomenon.[1] I also discuss the relevance of knowledge systems to my studio practice. I will not discuss the works I made in detail here, as they are the subjects of later chapters.

Object theories

Myriad theories and approaches to 'objects', 'things' and 'stuff' informed my project. The most important came from sociologist Sherry Turkle who states that "objects have lives that are multiple and fluid"[2], and political theorist Jane Bennett who claims that artists hear "the aesthetic call of things".[3] Turkle's collection of thirty-four autobiographical subject-object oriented essays in *Evocative Objects* focuses on the social role objects have in our lives. It demonstrates how people form attachments to different kinds of objects, from a suitcase, a glucometer to ephemeral objects like slime mould.[4] The essays highlight how we invest emotion in objects and Turkle suggests that everyday objects are more significant than we might think: "We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with".[5]

Turkle explains how the small collection of objects she kept in a closet provided clues to her identity and her absent biological father. Having grown up without my biological father, I empathise with this ability to project emotion onto objects as I have done the same with a small collection of keepsakes my father gave me. Turkle states that it is less familiar to us to consider "objects as companions to our emotional lives or provocations to thought".[6] My collection of objects has kept me company, helped explain my cultural hybridity and heritage and contributed to the construction of my narrative of belonging. Surrounding myself with my things has always been important to me; as Turkle says, "we live our lives in the middle of things. Material culture carries emotions and ideas of startling intensity".[7] My project aims to highlight this in light of experiences of migration from a first-generation Australian perspective.

1 Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,* Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité. October, 1984; ("Des Espace Autres," March 1967 Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec).
2 Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2011), 6.
3 Jane Bennett. "Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter", presented on occasion of the Vera List Centre's September 27, 2011, focus theme "Thingness".
4 Turkle, *Evocative Objects.*
5 ibid. 5.
6 ibid. 6.
7 ibid. 6.

Jane Bennett discusses "the active powers issuing from nonsubjects"[8] in a world where things surround us. She proposes to put things in the foreground, ultimately in the search for a more sustainable path. She compares artists and hoarders to explain 'thingness' or how it is that objects "hail us".[9] Bennett suggests that artists and hoarders share a certain sensibility, they have heightened or extreme perceptions and therefore hear the call of things more acutely. They are "more susceptible to the enchantment of things".[10] She claims, "the contemporary world retains the power to enchant humans and that humans can cultivate themselves so as to experience more of that effect".[11]

Much like object-oriented ontologist Timothy Morton who observes:

> We live in an infinite non-totalizable reality of unique objects, a reality that is infinitely rich and playful, enchanting, anarchic despite local pockets of hierarchy, infuriating, rippling with illusion and strangeness. In this reality, objects are perfectly straightforward, with no transcendental or hidden aspects. Yet precisely because of this very fact, objects are completely weird: they hide out in the open, under the spotlight. Their very appearance is a kind of miracle.[12]

With this in mind, I wanted to create artworks that could demonstrate my appreciation for, and accentuate the inherent beauty in small personal and everyday objects from my home to address my research questions.

Ordinary objects have the capacity to tell us about human behaviour. Museums use objects to tell stories. Neil MacGregor, former director of the British Museum, takes the approach of recounting history from the perspective of the object. The object is the witness, the observer, and it speaks for unwritten histories. As in object-oriented ontology, the object in my view is central rather than the human. He explains in *A History of the World in 100 Objects* that most of our history is not written and so with a bit of detective work, objects can provide insights into our past and our present, and knowledge of whole societies and individuals.[13] Each object he selected tells a story that has been pieced together by teams of experts including archaeologists, historians, ethnographers and museum curators. This approach to presenting history from the point of view of the object strongly supports my thesis which draws out the stories inherent in my own collections. However, while Macgregor offers an impersonal account of objects, mine is personal and invested. The objects I use are either from my memory museum or have been rescued from opportunity shops; they have hailed me because they remind me of a particular time or place or aesthetically speak to me.[14] Through my practice led enquiry I created a new place, a home, for these objects. I do not present one familial history but present the objects as fragments of a greater story with multiple storylines.

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai states;

> We have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things.

8 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter, a political ecology of things* (Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2010), ix.
9 Bennett, "Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter"
10 ibid.
11 Jane Bennett. *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001.) 4.
12 Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Open Humanities Press 2013), 55.
13 Neil MacGregor, n.d. *A History of The World in 100 Objects* (London, Penguin Books, 2010)
14 Bennett, "Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter".

> Thus, even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.[15]

Contrary to Appadurai, theorist Bill Brown thinks objects come to life when they are not in motion. He writes that: "We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls...The story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object orientation".[16] In examining my collection of objects as subjects for paintings I am drawn to the broken ones as they exude charm and pathos and, indeed, seem to come to life when I paint them.

A key theme in my project is reconciling the past with the present. One of the ways I have done this is through painting small souvenirs and keepsakes that I connect to personal memories. According to object relations theory, psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, these are transitional objects or "comfort objects"[17] that link us to childhood experiences. Winnicott noted that babies form attachments to transitional objects (for example, blankets, dummies or stuffed toys) and use babbling, daydreaming and singing as transitional phenomena. Babies adopt these transitional objects and phenomena as substitutes for their mother, to help them separate from her. As they mature they use other transitional objects as substitutions for other areas of their lives. Artists employ transitional objects and phenomena for their creativity.[18] For me transitional objects, such as the Buddha statue and the red Thai silk my father gave me, reflect multiple belongings and can also aid in reconstructing a narrative of past, and a celebration of the present.

Svetlana Boym believes that migrants utilise transitional objects to show their connection to their country, which resonates with my experiences of my family's migrant aesthetic and home decoration. To Boym, migrants' souvenirs of home represent the story of their exile not their origin. The souvenirs are transitional objects that remind migrants they belong in more than one place. For tourists the migrant's home country is exotic and its arts and crafts are admirable. For migrants, souvenirs represent their exile and their new home—they no longer represent their homeland alone.[19]

Boym states that: "For an immigrant, the proverb 'my home is my castle' doesn't quite work; rather, it should be 'my home is my museum'".[20] After migrating to Australia in the late 1950s my maternal and paternal families enacted Boym's scenario. They set up their homes with new objects and objects brought from Europe. In her analysis of the homes of soviet migrants to Brooklyn, USA Boym observes: "The Soviet Russian folk art on the immigrant bookshelves is not so much a nostalgic souvenir of Russia as a personal memory of friends left behind. The owner of the mass-reproduced souvenir becomes its new author, who tells an alternative narrative of its adventures".[21] In my case, I am the owner of the mass-produced souvenirs and other objects belonging to my family, and through my art, I am telling an alternative narrative of these objects' lives. Boym goes on to state: "Each home, even the most modest one, becomes a personal memory museum. Some apartment displays could easily compete with Ilya Kabakov's installations; willingly or not, each immigrant becomes an amateur artist in everyday life".[22] I touch on Kabakov's work again in Chapter 5.

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15 Arjun. Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.
16 Bill Brown, *Things* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.
17 Ruth Quibell, *The Promise of Things* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2016), 48 .
18 Anne D'Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History* (London, Laurence King, 2014), 95.
19 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 331-337.
20 ibid., 338.
21 ibid., 337.
22 ibid., 331.

The important role the souvenir has in connecting us to past events is discussed by Susan Stewart in *On Longing*. She states that "The souvenir distinguishes experiences. We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events thereby exist only through the invention of narrative".[23] Stewart goes on to discuss the souvenir in relation to themes of distance and intimacy. She proposes that souvenirs authenticate the past and discredit the present. We use them to discredit the present because it is overwhelming or alienating; we prefer the intimacy and authenticity of the past symbolised by the souvenir. Through souvenirs we can bridge the void between the present and our imagined innocent past, and experience that time again.[24] Considering this, the souvenirs that adorned my grandparent's houses comprise a large proportion of the objects I chose to paint.

My project aligns with the views of cultural geographer Katie Walsh, who posits "that thinking about belonging through belongings is productive because it is empirically and theoretically attentive to the way in which the home is experienced simultaneously as both a material and immaterial, lived and imagined, localized and (trans)national space of belonging".[25] I have explored this through detailed observational paintings of small personal objects belonging to me and my family.

A further key theoretical reference was cultural theorist Nikos Papastergiadis' idea of home. In *Spatial Aesthetics Art, Place and the Everyday* he argues that the home elicits many emotions and social meanings. Our home represents arrival and departure, and integration and separation. We belong at home and we make our home. Home is not just our place of origin but our search for our next destination.[26]

Theories pertaining to social space

Initially, the matter of nostalgia resonated for me as a creative tool: part personal and cultural, and part historical. As my practice and research infused, I explored this theme, from its etymological Greek roots (*nostos* "homecoming and *algos* pain")[27], to considering it in relation to notions of 'cultural hybridity' and 'third space'.[28] Indeed, the empirical experience of nostalgia is by no means a singular one. What does 'home' mean for migrants trying to reconstruct their homeland in a new place? What home is there for second and third generation immigrants? Do they experience nostalgia for an unknown land and time? Such questions are at the forefront of my practice.

Marxist philosopher Madan Syrup states, "Whist writing I often keep thinking of home. It is usually assumed that a sense of place or belonging gives a person stability. But what makes a place home? Is it wherever your family is, where you have been brought up? The children of many migrants are not sure where they belong. Where is home?"[29] As a child of migrant parents, these questions resonated with me. I was born and grew up in Australia, my family's home seemed an un-Australian space to me or another space. Homi Bhabha calls this other space the third space, which refers to the space where the first and second spaces work together to generate a new third space. This is a space where

23 Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2007), 135.
24 ibid., 139.
25 Katie Walsh, "British Expatriate Belongings: Mobile Homes and Transnational Homing", *Home Cultures*, 3:2, (2006): 123-144.
26 Nikos Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday* (London, Rivers Oram Press, 2006), 26.
27 Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer coined the term in 1688 to describe a clinical homesickness in Swiss soldiers. Online Etymology Dictionary. "Nostalgia", accessed 8th Februrary 2018, https://www.etymonline.com/word/nostalgia.
28 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010).
29 Madan Sarup, "Home and Identity", in *Travellers' Tales,* ed. George Roberston et.al. (London, Routledge, 2012), 94.

"the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.[30] Bhabha's analysis of cultural hybridity considers effects on places, people and cultures when cultures intersect in postcolonial situations. The idea of third space helped me understand the un-Australian feeling I had experienced with my family. In my painting and textile work, I make this third space visual and tacit.

Bhabha also argues: "The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation and meaning".[31] He defines hybridity as a "process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of identification – the subject – is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness. But the importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it".[32] Through the process of painting my objects I have been able to identify with aspects of my heritage and, more significantly, have been able to recognise my individuality that is created from the cultural hybrid experience.

In her essay "The migrant 'stranger' at home: 'Australian' shared values and the national imaginary," researcher Ellie Vasta found in her study that "some respondents are tentatively building a hybrid knowledge that consists of a mixture of 'Australian' and 'ethnic' values".[33] Using objects as a driver to make works of art, I have created a new visual hybrid lexicon of objects from my blended migrant family experience.

The writings of cultural geographer Edward Soja are also relevant for ideas of third space. Soja builds on Bhabha's conceptualisations and relates them to French philosopher Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopic space. Soja's 'Thirdspace' includes a combination of historical, spatial and social spaces.[34] Its appeal is that it combines the real and the imagined. In the "Trialectics of Space" he compares his third space with *The Aleph*, a fictional work by Jorge Borges. In Borges' story the Aleph is under the house of one the characters and is the point in space where all points meet, where everything that has ever happened exists together in the one space in time.[35] In my work I bring together objects from different times and cultures into the one space, giving all the objects the same treatment in terms of clarity of representation and displaying them with equality, like the Aleph.

Foucault's ideas of heterotopic space were another fundamental reference for my research. In "Other spaces; utopias and heterotopias", Foucault used the term to describe spaces that have more layers of meaning or relationships to other places than is at first apparent.[36] He outlined the following six defining principles of heterotopic space:

1. privileged or sacred or forbidden places
2. unlike ordinary cultural spaces
3. capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible
4. most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies
5. always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable

30 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 55.

31 Jonathan Rutherford, ed. "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha," *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 211.

32 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 38.

33 Ellie Vasta, "The migrant 'stranger' at home: 'Australian' shared values and the national imaginary", in *Reimagining Home in the 21st Century,* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017), 44.

34 Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places* (Cambridge, Mass, Blackwell, 1996).

35 Jorge Borges, *The Aleph and Other stories* (Penguin, 1945).

36 Foucault, *Of Other spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias.*

6. the last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains.[37]

Most relevant to my project were points three and four. As in a museum display I was grouping together objects from several places and time into the same space and the objects were not always compatible. During the course of my research I discovered that juxtaposing disparate objects not only compresses time but also changes the meaning of the object.

Knowedge systems

Foucault's concept of heterotopic space was inspired in part by the writing of Borges, who combined the real with the mythical in his fantastic taxonomy *The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge.* His taxonomy includes:

a) Those that belong to the emperor b) Embalmed ones c) Those that are trained d) Suckling pigs e) Mermaids (or Sirens) f) Fabulous ones g) Stray dogs h) Those that are included in this classification i) Those that tremble as if they were mad j) Innumerable ones k) Those drawn with a very fine camel hair brush l) *Et cetera* m) Those that have just broken the flower vase n) Those that, at a distance, resemble flies.[38]

This fanciful system contradicts the conventional definition of a taxonomy, which is "a system for naming and organising things".[39] Borges' taxonomy was influential in that I realised I could categorise and label the objects in my collection into my own knowledge system. I developed my taxonomy categories, applied them to my objects and created a digital archive called *Auditioning Objects.*[40] And, like Foucault, I was inspired by combining the real and the imagined, as Borges had done. The recurring themes of my work are the visual outcomes of combining the real with the not real (or the imagined or faded memory), and the past with the present.[41]

Precursors to museology the earliest archives and museums were personal *wunderkammers* or cabinets of curiosity, which famously combined disparate objects in a cabinet or an entire room (Fig. 1.1). *Wunderkammers* developed new, and always changing taxonomies that inferred shifting meanings to objects relative to their proximity to other objects. They were also spaces that created strange combinations of objects that would not ordinarily be together.[42]

Susan Stewart writes of the complexities of collections and collecting strategies, drawing on combinations of temporal, spatial, monetary or exchange value, memorial, nostalgic, formal—visual and other characteristics. In relation to personal collections she notes the retelling of autobiography and history, and the creation of "a fiction of the individual life, a time of the individual subject both transcendent to and parallel to historical time".[43] My cabinet of curiosities, housed in a 1980s china cabinet includes objects from the past and present, from the Netherlands, Finland, from my children: all special but certainly not all expensive (Fig. 1.2). I experimented with showing my collections in different ways, as real objects, in illustrations and paintings and in my virtual collection.

37 Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias.*
38 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things, An archaeology of the human sciences.* (London: Tavistock publications, 1970) xv.
39 Cambridge Disctionary, http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/taxonomy (accessed 1st September 2017).
40 Naomi Zouwer, "Auditioning Objects", http://zouwersobjects.blogspot.com.au/2014/10/silver-jug.html (accessed 6th February 2018).
41 Foucault, *The Order of Things,* xvii.
42 Patrick Mauries, *Cabinets of Curiosities* (United Kingdom, Thames and Hudson, 2002).
43 Stewart, *On Longing*, 154.

Conclusion

The references discussed above provided a framework for my research, and a way to see a relationship between my ideas and methodology and broader visual practice. The significant concepts that came from this research were: the relationship to objects for migrant families to construct narratives of belonging; the notion of other spaces and the compression of time that occurs in spaces like museums and *wunderkammers*; and ways of organising objects into a system that could be adapted to a practice-led research method. In the field of object studies my research addresses concerns with the status of ordinary objects. I reinterpret these trivial objects through painting and textiles as signifiers of belonging to more than one place. They simultaneously bridge the void between past and present, elaborate on about human behaviour and enchant us. My research brings together seemingly incompatible objects from different times and places into a heterotopic space. Bringing objects together in this way changes the meaning of the individual object and creates a new hybrid object that contains multiple stories of belonging and migration.

The next chapter focuses on the role of objects in making sense of my mixed migrant heritage and examines why I am drawn to certain objects. It describes a knowledge system created to document, order and archive them as a starting point for the creation of my art works.

Fig. 1.1 Domenico Remps, *Cabinet of Curiosities*

Fig. 1.2 My cabinet of curiosities

Object 3 Vanilla wogs

They came by ship, the Orion, to Australia from Finland in 1958. My mother was the middle child; she had an older brother and younger sister. On arrival in Melbourne, the parents and the children were sent to Bonegilla Migrant Hostel just outside Albury, where they stayed for a month waiting to be relocated. Eventually, they were sent to Canberra, to 22 Furneaux Street, Manuka. The house was opposite a Catholic school. The school kids would chant 'vanilla wog' at my mum and tease her for her accent and her appearance—her practical clothes and her haircut. Mum was seven. My grandfather built houses. Later he moved the family into a garage on an empty lot while he built a house. My grandmother worked as a cleaner at the hospital. Left to their own devices, the kids would explore the surrounding hills, Red Hill and Mount Ainslie, light campfires, make billy tea and smoke cigarettes.

Finally, after eight years of learning the language and adjusting to the climate and the culture, my grandfather declared he hated Australia and took the family back to Finland. My mother and her siblings were now completely displaced, their Finnish language was sloppy, and they had lost touch with their culture. Stripping off and having saunas together was something that my mother could not come at and this enraged her father. My mother was miserable. She got a job as an office clerk in a glue factory. No more school. She was 15. She wanted to go back to Australia. She threatened to throw herself in the Tampere River if they didn't return. So, they did. But one day my grandfather disappeared. My grandmother told the children he had gone north looking for a cane plantation. It turned out he had gone back to Finland and left his family in Australia. He lived the rest of his life in Finland.

Obj. 3 Naomi Zouwer, *Reindeer*

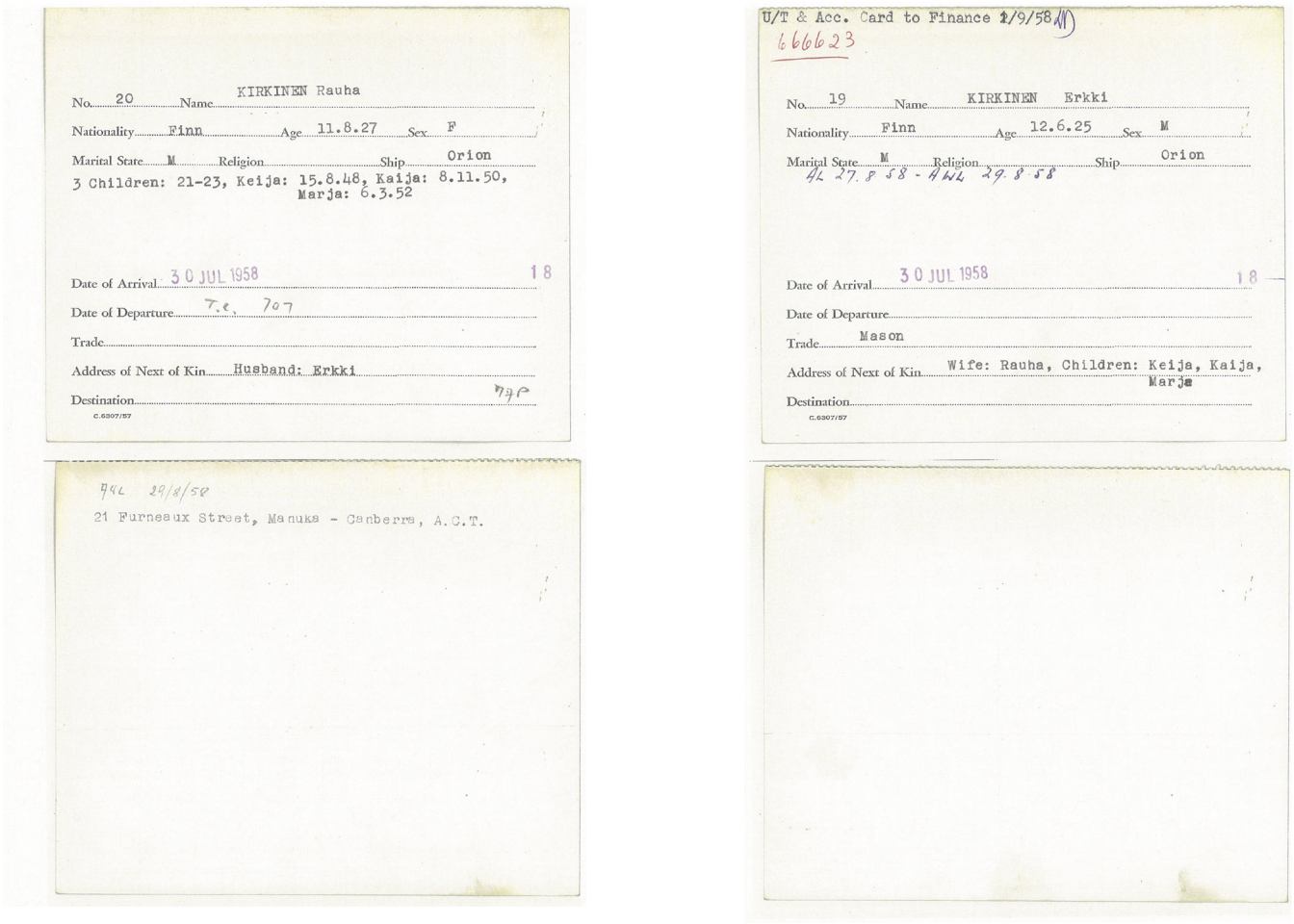

Fig. 2.1 My Grandparent's ID cards from Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre

2 Understanding the attraction of family migration objects

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss a selection of works from the first year of my candidature: *Auditioning Objects* blog and *Auditioning Objects* paper objects, *Domestic Taxonomy* embroidery, the *Puffies* soft sculptures and digital printing and surface embellishment experiments. In these works I attempted to understand the attraction of family migration objects; objects which represented my identity and held personal memories. I set out to explore the objects' capabilities to tell stories using painting and textiles techniques. I started with my memory museum, a combination of family stories I had collected and objects from my cabinet of curiosities, mainly those collected by my migrant grandparents. At this stage, I focused on material relating to the Dutch and Finnish heritage of my grandparents. I experimented widely, and my practice oscillated from two-dimensions to three-dimensions and back again. This was due in part to inexperience and lack of confidence in using sculptural techniques and being more comfortable with the two-dimensional picture plane.

During the first year in the studio I formulated several questions. They were:

• In what ways can knowledge systems assist in the creation of art works?

• How can juxtaposing unexpected objects change their individual and collective meaning and create new spaces and, consequently, new narratives and new interpretive possibilities that I had not explored before? Could I make more engaging and dynamic works by creating these new combinations?

• What, if anything, can be revealed about a group of objects through analysing them in terms of Foucault's notion of heterotopic space?

• If still life can be viewed as 'animated,' can 're-animating' still life create new stories? How might this change the object's stories and functions as expressed in the artwork? What happens if you take away the space between objects within the still life, would the objects read differently, would they be more mobile, would this create more potential for an installation of paintings rather than being confined to the traditional rectangular canvas?

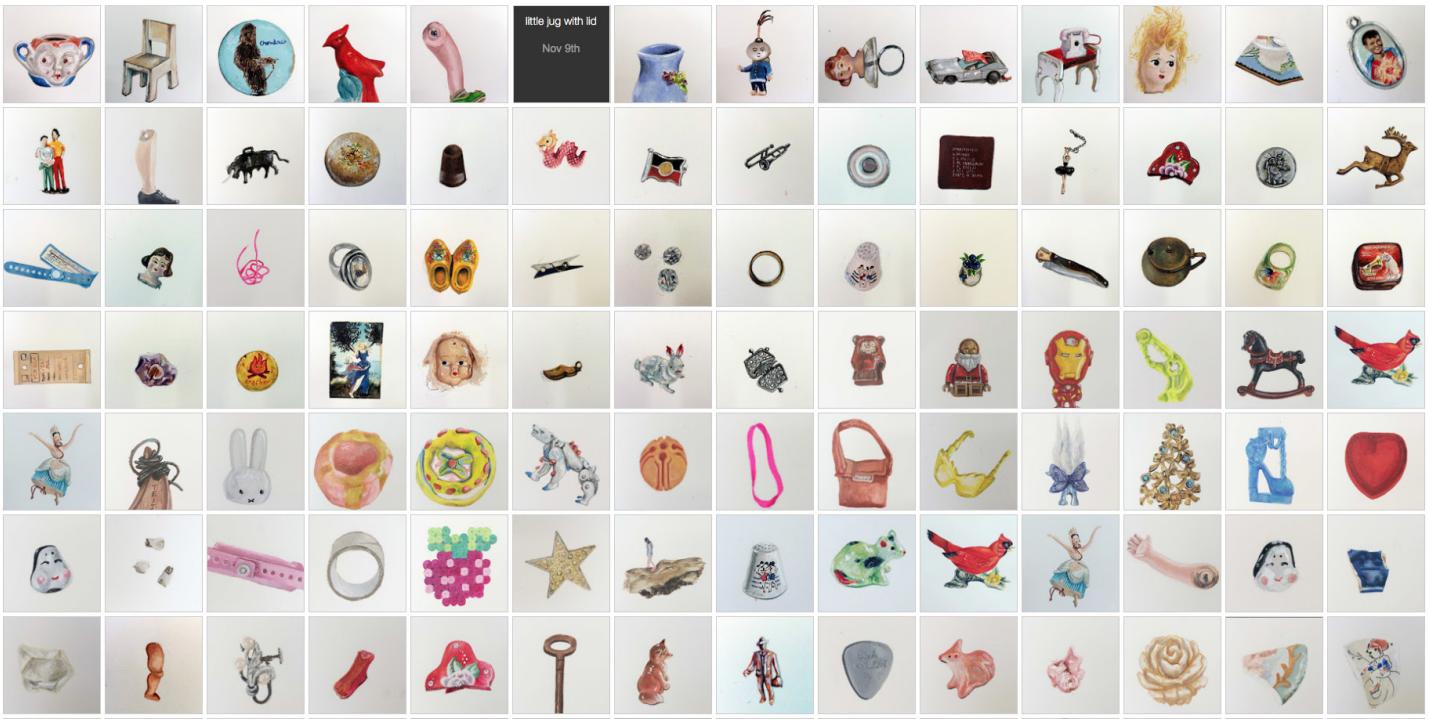

Fig. 2.2 Screenshot of *Auditioning Objects* blog

Auditioning Objects: blog

To understand the attraction of family migration objects and their narrative potential I created a blog (Fig. 2.2). This also allowed me to make and store information for later art works. My investigation involved researching knowledge systems and exploring the work of artists who used knowledge systems and archives, in particular David Watt and Lyndie Dourthe whose work I will discuss later in the chapter.

I wanted to understand my motives for choosing certain objects to paint. The blog allowed me to analyse ideas, images and to catalogue the objects themselves by taking them through an auditioning process. I only desired to work with an object if it was appealing enough in its physical and metaphysical properties.

The auditioning objects process involved several steps that began in analogue mode and ended up in the virtual sphere. Firstly, I sketched the object in pencil. Then I painted it with watercolour, noting down its colour attributes and surface qualities, and considered its aesthetic qualities, its provenance, associated stories and any theoretical or historical connections. Some objects did not go past the drawing phase and remained as illustrations on the blog, others I took further and used in later art works. This sped up my making process, as my oil painting was slow and time-consuming, and helped me sort out early on which objects were going to work for me.

Building on my use and analysis of objects I began researching taxonomies and developing my own, which was influenced by Jorge Borges' fictional taxonomy *The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* as mentioned in Chapter 1. I developed various categories and applied them as electronic labels in my *Auditioning Objects* blog. My taxonomy, which I called *Naomi's Domestic Taxonomy,* included the following categories; a) those belonging to the mother, b) dirty ones, c) clean ones, d) those that have a function, e) those that are purely decorative, f) those that are drawn with a very fine ink nib, g) those that from a distance look like relatives, h) uncountable ones, i) marvellous ones, J) broken or out of order, K) edible, L) of sentimental value, M) useless.

The labels included information on the materials, colour, origin and form. I then organised

the objects by their labels. For example, the category 'belonging to the mother' grouped all the objects that were my mother's, which I found was a majority of my collection. I could call up all the objects with the label 'blue' assigned to them and find a group of objects connected by colour but otherwise not associated. This process allowed me to investigate and consider alternative groupings for creating compositions. It also urged me to consider the different (and sometimes hidden) tacit or implicit relationships between different objects – which stories were stand alone, and which stories belonged to ensembles?

Following this, if I felt moved to, I wrote anecdotes related to the objects. This was similar to the process I used when I worked as a museum curator at the National Museum of Australia (from 2002 to 2004) and wrote statements of significance about objects in the collection. This involved conducting interviews and researching the provenance of particular objects and sometimes meant trawling through archives to find information and evidence. The object's story would be distilled into twenty-five words on a label in a display case. When I applied this process to my work, I was creating object stories from my memory museum for my archive waiting to be curated. I then stored the data on the blog for future reference. I hoped that using this cataloguing system and integrating it with my making process would allow me to articulate my ideas around the objects, document the object's story and help me dissect and analyse my motivations and attractions to the objects.

As a result of research into knowledge systems, I decided to investigate connections between image and word. And so, for documentation on my blog, I adopted an approach to writing devised by Professor Jane Rendell, in her essay "The Welsh Dresser".[1]

The approach has four parts:

1. Image of the object
2. Definition and etymology of the word
3. A personal reflection about the object
4. Perceived connections to theoretical and philosophical theories.

Although the process is somewhat reductive, the attraction was a clear, systematic means of organising my thoughts about the objects and it allowed me to look deeper and consider alternative meanings for individual objects. Each object is an entry – like a dictionary or lexicon for my practice. Under each object is a definition and etymology, followed by a paragraph about the object from a personal perspective, such as a story or a quality about the object that appealed to me. I wrote about the philosophical and theoretical connections. For example, for my grandmother's clog, my data included;

Clog
A shoe with a thick wooden sole.
An encumbrance or impediment.
To block or become blocked with an accumulation of thick, wet matter.
Middle English clogge short thick piece of wood.
First Known Use: 14th century.

My Oma always had this pair of clogs at the front door of the houses she lived in. I notice a lot of Dutch families in Australia place a pair of clogs on their front step. It works like a sign; Dutch people live here. I now have Oma's clogs on my front step.
Labels: clog, decorative, domestic, Holland, nostalgia, Oma, souvenir, watercolour, wood.[2]

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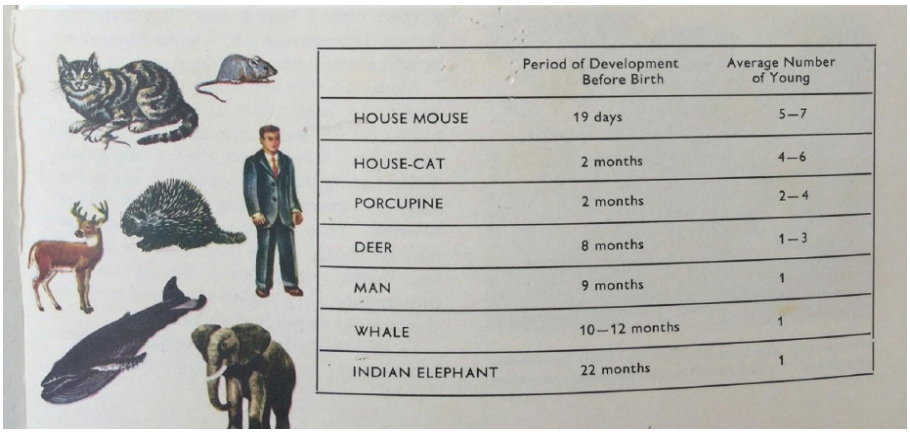
1 Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*.

2 Naomi Zouwer, "Auditioning Objects", http://zouwersobjects.blogspot.com.au/2014/03/wooden-clog.html , (accessed 6th February 2018).

Connecting the images with words was initially helpful. I could dip into the blog, which was now my archive, as if it were a collection of recipes for composition. More interactive than a sketchbook, this resource allowed me to assemble and disassemble amalgams of images and their textual properties, testing the results as I went. I continually updated and added to this archive as my project developed and used it for works later in my candidature.

Initially, the objects I collected during my 'auditioning' phase lived together in my cabinet of curiosity. I had long been attracted to cabinets of curiosities, museum displays and collections, which had led me to investigate various knowledge systems, such as classifications and taxonomies. I was also attracted to illustrated knowledge systems like those found in encyclopaedias from my childhood (Fig.2.3).

Art Historian Jules Prown suggests a system of analysis to "extract information about culture, about mind, from mute objects".[3] Of particular interest was his observation of the relationship between the object and viewer. He says: "It involves the empathetic linking of the material (actual) or represented world of the object with the perceiver's world of existence and experience. To put it another way, the analyst contemplates what it would be like to use or interact with the object, or, in the case of a representational object, to be transported empathetically into the depicted world".[4] He proposes the viewer considers their sensory engagement, intellectual engagement, and emotional response then enters into speculation about the object.



	Period of Development Before Birth	Average Number of Young
HOUSE MOUSE	19 days	5—7
HOUSE-CAT	2 months	4—6
PORCUPINE	2 months	2—4
DEER	8 months	1—3
MAN	9 months	1
WHALE	10—12 months	1
INDIAN ELEPHANT	22 months	1

Fig. 2.3 an illustration of humans' and animals' gestation period that I discovered in a 1960s children's encyclopaedia was watching over me from my pin board during my candidature.

3 Jules David Prown. *Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method,* Winterthur Portfolio, Vol. 17, No. 1. (Spring, 1982), (The University of Chicago Press.), 7.

4 ibid, 8.

Fig. 2.4 Naomi Zouwer, *Auditioning Objects Extended*

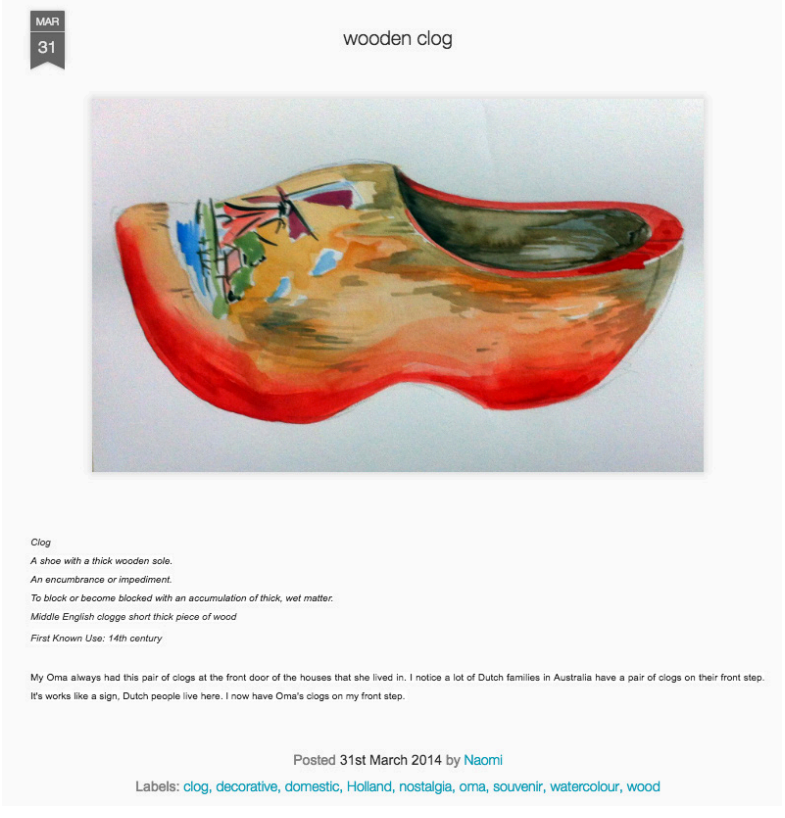


Fig. 2.5 screenshot of a single entry form *Auditioning Objects Blog*

Fig. 2.6 David Watt, *Knowledge*

David Watt: *Knowledge*

A key artwork in my research for the ideas discussed above was *Knowledge* (Fig. 2.6) by David Watt (1952-1998). *Knowledge* is drawn from an archive, combining disparate objects from the past and present, the real and unreal (like Borges' taxonomy), and uses an absurd scale and a sense of humour and playfulness. These were elements I wanted to include in my work.

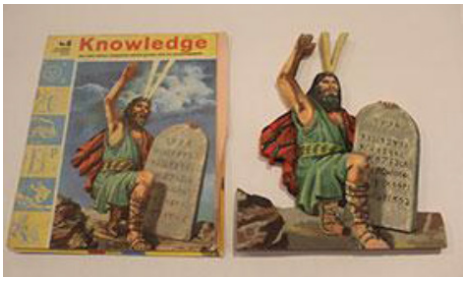
Knowledge is made from a collection of 72 painted images on composition board that are then cut out. The images are taken directly from the publication *Encyclopaedia of knowledge c.1960,* and the disproportionate scale relates to the scale of the illustrations in the book (Figs. 2.7, 2.8, 2.9). The images are typical of a child's encyclopaedia; fruit, maps, graphs, historical and mythical figures (Fig. 2.10).

I examined this work through the lens of Foucault's ideas on heterotopia — mainly the practice of juxtaposing unexpected objects — to change objects' individual and collective meaning and create new spaces where objects are in new relationships, and consequently develop new narratives and new interpretive possibilities.[5] *Knowledge* achieves this construction of space.

Knowledge invents its own set of "relations [that it] simultaneously represents, contests and inverts".[6] It cleverly juxtaposes several sites that seem incompatible. It also presents a collection of time by combining different objects from different points in time, from different cultures, myths and legends, mixing fact and fiction in the one space. This, and the multiple layers of meaning this technique generates is a theme that I have explored more deeply in my work.

Watt played with absurd scale as my work does. My work explores small handheld sized objects and miniatures, and one of my final works is a group of three oversized, gigantic tower structures made from discarded domestic embroidery.

5 Foucault, *Of Other spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, 6.
6 ibid, 6.



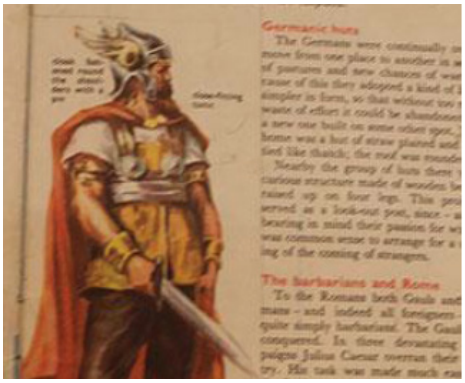


Fig. 2.7 Image of the cover of *Encyclopaedia of Knowledge* Magazine
Fig. 2.8 *Encyclopaedia of Knowledge* Magazine page showing Thor's helmet with a small x5 mark next to it
Fig. 2.9 *Encyclopaedia of Knowledge* Magazine page and painted piece
Fig. 2.10 David Watt, *Knowledge* (detail)

Auditioning Objects: paper objects

Auditioning Objects Extended, 2014, (Fig. 2.4) was made from the collection of watercolour sketches originally intended only for use on my blog as studies for my auditioning process. I made drawings of personal objects and came to know them more intimately through detailed observation. As my pile of drawings grew, it became apparent that I could use them in other ways. It made sense to cut away the background as I had been doing with my other work; this also meant I could test the object and spatial relations in the early stages before committing them to oil paint. By cutting the images out, they come into the three-dimensional world and by placing them together they seem to come to life, to animate. Taking away the background and combining objects on a plinth and climbing up the wall created an intriguing space. The objects were painted with different perspectives; there was no aerial or linear perspective, no foreground, middle-ground or background. When put together, the colour was uniformly intense and bright, and the scale did not diminish into the distance. All the objects were painted at different times and so had different light sources to each other. Some were true to scale, some bigger and others smaller.

To the viewer there did not seem to be an obvious reason why these objects should be together. They were connected by me, however, multiple groups could be made from these objects. At this time Foucault's theory of heterotopic spaces presented a way to understand the complex spatial and temporal relations of my objects and their stories.

Again, I was motivated by Watt's cut-out works and illustrative style. The freedom of having no background allowed for countless installation and compositional possibilities. Other relevant works were by contemporary artist, eX de Medici, whose detailed paintings of kitsch objects and flowers can be read as a contemporary *vanitas* composition. Her use of watercolour and vibrant colour was similar to my exaggerated high-key colour palette (Fig. 2.11).

Fig. 2.11 eX de Medici, *Red Colony*

Domestic Taxonomy: embroidery

Domestic Taxonomy is an embroidered work that combines cross-stitch, and some long stitch experimentation for a painterly effect. I chose to work with embroidery because I wanted to move away from painting and investigate the potential of a new medium. Embroidery also appealed as it was both portable and less toxic than oil painting. As a painter the blending of colours and build-up of layers of this type of free embroidery was appealing.

In this work, I was reflecting on my childhood and making my memories physically tangible through the embroidery. Gaston Bachelard says that: "after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are".[7] My intention was that the embroidery with all its parts, objects and figures. floating in space, detached from the background, would convey a sense of a memory suspended in time.

I worked with embroidery floss on Aida cloth, which has a grid structure used for more formal stitching like cross-stitch. Later in my candidature, the grid structure became a major unifying element between my painting and textile works. I experimented with finishing the edges in different ways as I was new to the medium and was exploring potential techniques and effects. Some edges were left raw so you could see the makings of the work. Others were folded under and sewn in, and in some parts stitched into a distracting white edge, which became a sharp outline. I removed the background and concentrated on the forms of objects and people in a similar way to Watt's *Knowledge*.

Fig. 2.12 Cayce Zavaglia, *Abbi*

The work of Cayce Zavaglia, an Australian-born artist living in America was also relevant. Painter turned embroiderer, she made realistic portraits using fine embroidery thread and thousands of stitches (Fig. 2.12). Her portraits create the illusion of a painting at first glance and are both realistic and painterly. For my central figures in *Domestic Taxonomy* (Figs. 2.14, 2.16), I attempted to paint with thread in the same vein as Zavaglia, the result, however, was cruder and less detailed.

7 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of space* (Beacon Press, 1992), 5.

Fig. 2.13 Slide of my Oma and Opa and their son Jimmy c.1962 Waratah Street O'Connor, Canberra, with Mt. Ainslie in the background

Fig. 2.14 Naomi Zouwer, *Domestic Taxonomy*

To make this narrative work about my Dutch family in Canberra in the 1960s, I used a selection of images from my *Auditioning Objects* archive and drew from a slide of my grandparents in front of their house in O'Connor, Canberra (Fig. 2.13). It was one of several slides I saved when they ruthlessly culled their objects before they moved into residential aged care. I found this purging process compelling: how did they decide what was important to keep? How could they not keep the old photos? Aren't they meant to be the first things you save when the house is burning down? For people who had defined their personalities by their objects for so long, I found it fascinating to watch them let go of things so readily. Nikos Papastergiadis writes about the significance of photography to migrants; "Like many migrants of the twentieth century, my parents lived with the photographs of their friends, parents and homes in the way that religious people live with icons. Photographs are like mobile homes or like the filakto, the miniature icons that protected those who journeyed to unknown shores".[8] In a similar way I used photographs to make works of art to make sense of my world. I used photographs from my family archive dating from the 1950s to the 1970s taken before and after their immigration to Australia from Finland and the Netherlands. A particular photograph, however, of my Dutch grandparents and their son Jimmy became pivotal. It represented migrants making a new home, childhood memories, family relationships and object-subject relationships. The photograph was the object.

Fig. 2.15 Naomi Zouwer, *Slides form Domestic Taxonomy* (detail)

8 Papasergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday*, 44.

The following examples are a selection from *Auditioning Objects* used to make *Domestic Taxonomy* embroidery, and the story of their representation, and how they made it into the final work (Fig. 2.8).

The anvil in my *Domestic Taxonomy* embroidery represents a story of my Dutch grandfather who, when he first came to Australia, bought an anvil instead of a house. A bit like Jack and the Beanstalk, but the anvil wasn't magic. They never owned a home, but as he said, "It was a good anvil!" and he made lots of ironwork. The anvil represents this anecdote and hard work and transformation. The orange Bakelite canister and the lemon salt shaker represent 1960s domestic life, which was when my family were setting up home in Australia. The stack of slides and slide viewer are now redundant technologies, but it was through the slides and the projector that I found these images from my family's past; they also stand for the nostalgia of time since past (Fig. 2.15). The pliers represent the 'make do' ethos and making something out of nothing which my grandparents did very well as they set up their new life. Finally, there are the omnipresent clogs from the entrance of my grandparents' home; the clogs represented home for them.

Up to this point, through my object investigation, I had documented my connection and interpretation of the object's story, not my grandparents' or parents' first-hand migration

Fig. 2.16 Naomi Zouwer, *Domestic Taxonomy* (detail)

stories. My stories were fragmented and linked to pieces, whole and broken, like the objects themselves. I had incomplete narratives swimming around my head, mixing fact and fiction. In the works that were to follow I allude to stories but never offer a complete narrative.

The Puffies – soft sculptures

In conjunction with my *Auditioning Objects* process, I made traditional still life paintings using oil on canvas, of objects and combined textile techniques to make soft sculptures of objects. I researched seventeenth century Dutch still life traditions, cut out paintings, as well as *trompe l'oeil* paintings by Cornelius Gijsbrecht. Additionally, I studied contemporary artists who had used knowledge systems as points of reference, like Watt, Dourthe, and also Mirka Mora who combined painting and textiles to make sculptures.

Fig. 2.17 Naomi Zouwer, *Fabulous ones*

My aim was to create open-ended narratives. I made soft sculptural objects from paintings that I cut up and sewed back together to make three-dimensional objects. I named them The *Puffies* (Fig. 2.17). I was excited about these works at first because I could make physically movable and interchangeable compositions. I could also continue to experiment with juxtaposing objects and images of people of absurd scale which proposed narratives about people, objects and ideas of home.

I began making *Puffies* out of frustration with several still life paintings I had made that were compositionally or technically deficient. I felt there was predictability about the rectangle canvas and still life object composition. However, I was not tired of the observational painting process itself, and in fact found it very satisfying to study objects for great lengths of time and document them in paint in the manner of Dutch still life painting, observing and documenting the world around me.

Cutting up the paintings was liberating, and their narrative potential was exciting (Figs. 2.18, 2.19). Further, creating soft sculptures took me away from working with a vertical canvas and enabled me to make something new. I approached these three-dimensional works as I would a traditional still life painting. I set up the objects, arranged the lighting, made a tonal sketch, and then a coloured sketch in order to assess the composition before committing it to oil paint. When satisfied with the arrangement, I painted a coloured ground either in pink or orange on a stretched lightweight canvas. The canvas was a fine-weave with a smooth surface to allow more detailed painting and because it was easier to sew than heavy canvas. I then used oil paint to create the painting in a realistic style in keeping with the traditions of Dutch still life painting.

Fig. 2.18 and 2.19 Cutting up my oil paintings to make *Puffies*

When I perceived the painting as complete I cut it up and sewed it into multiple objects with backs, fronts and a base. I filled the inside with synthetic stuffing and nestled a weight at the bottom of the form. The sewing construction was visible and rough: you could see the stitches and white thread around the outside of the form. This roughness made them appear like loved objects, slightly knocked about or imperfect. It also made it clear that these objects were once part of a two-dimensional painting as the remaining traces of the background alluded to their previous lives.

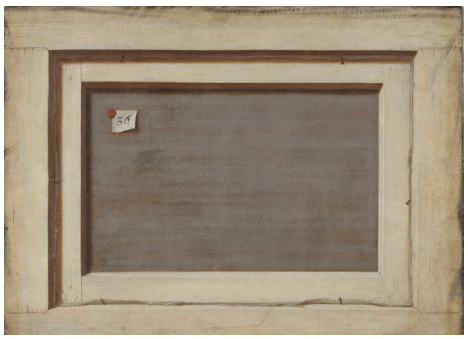


Fig. 2.20 Cornelius Gijsbrecht, *Reverse side of the painting*

Fig. 2.21 Cornelius Gijsbrecht, *Easel cut out*

With these works I wanted to elicit a physical response from the viewer, I was hopeful that the audience would feel a sense of wonder that a 'precious painting' had been cut up and that this would make for prolonged engagement with the work. In the object ensembles of soft sculptural paintings, the remains of the background, for example, a table setting or an outside scene, were still visible. Some of the *Puffies* were constructed from objects that could have appeared in still life painting, while others were inspired by images of family members from my collection of slides.

My soft painted sculptures were operating in a similar way to cut outs or *chantourne* paintings from the seventeenth century. I made them so they could physically stand-alone and because of their material quality, the way they drooped and flopped, they appeared

Fig. 2.22 Mirka Mora, *Girl Riding Bird*

Fig. 2.23 Naomi Zouwer, *Budgie and Oma*

to have pathos and personality. And like Gijsbrecht's *Easel cut out*, c.1670, painting, my works were playful (Figs. 2.20, 2.21). Another similarity with Gijsbrecht was that he "also mixed illusion and reality in his *chantourne* paintings".[9] I did this by combining images of family with oversized objects from domestic settings.

The *Puffies* reminded me of the work of Mirka Mora (1928-2018), who was born in France and immigrated to Australia in the 1950s. Her textile works, particularly her whimsical hand-painted dolls, resonated with me as they are both figurative and painted. Stylistically her works are naive, and painted in flat, bright colours with vast areas of patterns. Her soft sculptures, or dolls, cross the divide between painting and sculpture. Mora's characters have stylized features, big eyes with relaxed lids, and gentle facial expressions and are often of mythical figures, animals, angels and birds (Fig. 2.22).

Dislocating my still life objects from the canvas provided a dynamic means to refocus the narrative, and play with the composition and its meaning. I was making sense of things, in a way, from the previous space to the next. Art historian Briony Fer writes about the charged power of the spaces in between objects in a still life and how these spaces are the most fascinating. She states, "In the most interesting still life painting the spaces between things, rather than the things themselves, trigger an extreme mobility".[10]

As well as examining the spaces in between my three-dimensional painted objects, I was curious to explore the potential relationships between the objects in the new space that resulted from removing the images from the canvas. Was a new type of space created by putting these objects and images of people together (Fig. 2.23)? Why were these strange combinations intriguing to me?

9 Olaf Koester. *Painted Illusions, The Art of Cornelius Gijsbrechts* (National Gallery Company Limited, London, 2000), 52.

10 Briony Fer, "The Scatter: Sculpture as Leftover" in Molesworth, H, (ed.) *Part Object Part Sculpture*. (Wexner Center for the Arts, Pennsylvania State University, 2005), 222-233.

Fig. 2.24 Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*

Foucault uses some examples of heterotopic sites including the space found in the reflection of mirrors. As he explains:

> The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.[11]

Art historian Danielle Manning discusses the role of mirrors as heterotopic spaces in still life paintings. She states that "by analysing how Foucault describes the spatial construction of *Las Meninas* (Fig. 2.24), it is evident that Velázquez has strategically manipulated the laws of pictorial construction, the ordering principles that encourage us to view the scene as a realistic space. As a result, multiple 'realities' are juxtaposed".[12]

To explore this concept further in my practice I used a gilded mirror in an installation of a group of *Puffies*, titled *Fabulous ones* (Fig. 2.17), in an exhibition in the foyer gallery at the School of Art in July 2014. *Fabulous ones* were a combination of three paintings of objects including a salt shaker in the shape of a chicken, a budgie ornament, a Delft blue clog, a shell lamp, a small duck and a rattle. The work brought together representations of objects from different times and with different functions to create a heterotopic space, with the reflection in the mirror functioning as yet another heterotopic space where multiple 'realities' are juxtaposed.

11 Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*, 4.

12 Dannielle Manning, "(Re)visioning Heterotopia: The Function of Mirrors and Reflection in Seventeenth-Century Painting" Queen's Journal of Visual & Material Culture, Issue 1 (2008): 4.

In taking apart the paintings and making three-dimensional objects, I had been able to experiment with different combinations of objects from the same painting and various paintings. I enjoyed the result of combining the real with the imagined; people and objects of absurd scale like Watt's *Knowledge*, in strange settings. As part of this exploration into three-dimensional works, I experimented with digital technology to enlarge the scale of the *Puffies* and make multiples for an installation and also to animate my works, literally bringing to life my object stories. At the same time I explored combining more textile techniques with my painting, like embroidery (Fig.2.26).

I examined the works of Dourthe and her use of embroidery and surface embellishment over digital prints on fabric. I wanted to experiment with changing the surface quality of the work by combining textures to interrupt the surface and make it more tactile, in a similar way. Dourthe combined digital printing with textiles in her *Curiosities Series,* 2012 (Fig. 2.25). She used nostalgic imagery from illustrated text books digitally printed on fabric with beads stitched on to embellish her objects and displayed them in glass cloches or pinned them to the wall like biology specimens. Dourthe also utilised distinct stitches to sew her work together to make three-dimensional forms. The beads represented flesh and mould, and she pinned tiny prints of flies over her objects.

Fig. 2.25 Lyndie Dourthe, *Curiosities* (detail)

Fig. 2.26 Nami Zouwer, *Big John Studd with beads and embroidery embellishment*

My experiments with digital technology involved several steps. I had a selection of my paintings photographed and printed digitally onto fabric. I printed on linen, cotton and sarking, a metallic silver woven material used to insulate houses. Using a large format

Fig. 2.27 Large bird ***Puffies*** on canvas, made with the large format inkjet printer - me for scale.

scanner in the ink jet facility at ANU School of Art and Design I was able to print large prints of my paintings on to the various substrates I enlarged my bird fig. paintings by 500% (Fig. 2.27). However, when I cut out the large budgie printed on sarking and filled it with stuffing, it immediately looked like a helium balloon. The canvas print produced a strange result, which was not satisfactory. The simulated texture of canvas printed on canvas combined with the 'off gassing' of the prints gave them a repulsive quality. I painted back over the print, deciding it was good to use as underpainting. I had also lost a lot of tonal contrast and detail in the process so I could paint it back in at this stage. I concluded that the evidence of the hand painting and the small scale was what gave my work pathos and it was lost in digital reproduction.

I was curious to see what would happen if I interrupted the surface by piercing it with embroidery thread and covering parts with sequins and beads to make the works more textural and tactile as in Dourthe's work. *That From a Distance Look Like Flies* (Fig. 2.28), is an example of these experiments, combining cross stitch embroidery and fake grass with a small three-dimensional painting.

Fig. 2.28
Naomi Zouwer,
That From a Distance Look Like Flies

Fig. 2.29 Pinaree Sanpitak, ***Temporary Insanity***

When making my three-dimensional still life paintings I had the idea of animating the objects; I initially intended this as the largest part of my practice-led research. I experimented with Arduino electronics with a view to inserting motion sensors into the *Puffies* to make them move. I wanted to create an installation of multiples that interacted with the audience to create a playful and sensory experience. This idea came from Pinaree Sanpitak's sound-activated installation, *Temporary Insanity*, which was a room filled with large soft breast-like forms made out of orange Thai silk. The forms wiggled and hummed, responding to sound sensors when viewers clapped or stamped their feet (Fig. 2.29).

As an initial test working with electronics I made a zoetrope. I embroidered ten frames of simple still life with a skull, candle and rose (Fig. 2.30). In the animation, the candle was meant to blow out and the rose decay, thus referencing a *vanitas* still life painting. However, the result was disappointing, it needed more frames to make the transitions more seamless and the zoetrope proposed technical issues that were time consuming and I abandonded the idea.

I decided to use the skills I did have to make stop motion animation using my *Puffies* as actors. I photographed my puffy paintings, then moved them a small amount and photographed them again until I had 400 frames (Fig. 2.31, 2.32). I then had the photos edited into a short stop-motion movie. This did animate the *Puffies* but it was a clunky amateur animation that convinced me the idea was not worth pursuing.

Fig. 2.30 Naomi Zouwer, *Embroidered vanitas,* work in progress.

Fig. 2.31 Frame from stop-motion animation of the *Puffies*

Fig. 2.32Attempting to animate *Puffies*

Fig. 2.33 The *Puffies* in the studio

Conclusion

By the end of my first year, I had explored two-dimensional, three-dimensional and virtual possibilities using objects from my memory museum to tell my family's stories of migration and settlement. I had used knowledge systems to make art works by creating one in the form of the *Auditioning Objects* blog and by creating and applying my taxonomic labels for cataloguing. And I had researched other artists' ways of using knowledge systems to make works, including David Watt. I wanted to continue on this trajectory; it was helping me make sense of things.

Through making *Oma and the budgie, Fabulous ones* and *Auditioning Objects extended paper objects* I discovered that juxtaposing unexpected objects can change their individual and collective meaning and create new spaces and, consequently, new narratives and new interpretive possibilities. It can also encourage prolonged engagement with works. I determined that Foucault's notion of heterotopic space provided a way to analyse art works and make it possible to view multiple realities in one space, either through the use of a mirror's reflection or by combining unexpected objects from different spaces into one space. The combination of real and imagined was a theme that continued to surface during my project; it was evident in the taxonomy of Borges, in Foucault's heterotopic space theory, in memories and recounting of stories and also, in third space theory. I elaborate more on this in Chapter 5.

Through material experimentation and multiple tests I discovered that by cutting images of objects away from their backgrounds, essentially dislocating them, I could mobilise, activate and animate them. This dislocation related to the ideas of migration I was dealing with and enabled them to be slightly unsettled but more engaging storytellers of migration experiences, and narratives of belonging.

The most significant development I made, however, was that my project changed from being about animating still life to exploring my role as the memory keeper and 'guardian' or vessel for family stories. Through my art practice, as a first generation Australian, I was making sense of my experiences of migration and dislocation and putting them into my social context. My family had migrated to Australia for a better life for their families, and although I knew and appreciated this, I realised through my art practice that I placed a different value on their memories and stories than they did. I was the new owner of the stories and my project needed to focus on my analysis of them.

After exhaustive experiments, I became aware by the end of the first year that I had begun to lose the energy of the connection with my collection of objects. I needed to revisit my migrant heritage to gain a deeper understanding of what I was trying to do in the studio. I decided to embark on fieldwork to my parents' countries of birth. In Chapter 3 I discuss key works and ideas I encountered during my research in Finland and the Netherlands and how Dutch artists used and rendered textile objects in paint and used objects differently.

Object 4 hätätilanteessa tauon lasiv

(in case of emergency break glass)

My Mummo's house in the hot outer suburbs of Tuggeranong, Canberra was where we celebrated Christmas Eve, 'Finnish style'. Mummo would dress up as Santa Claus by putting on her Lappi hat that was made of blue felt with four points and reindeer fur trim and red, yellow and white ric-rac and embroidered ribbons. The hat was from Finnish Lapland, and so was she. Her house had lots of souvenirs from Finland; in every room, there was something to look at. She had shoes made of woven birch tree bark and an ornately bent cane rug beater next to a shaggy orange and brown wall hanging as you came into the house. The paintings she had were originals, mostly landscapes and my favourite was a snow scene with purple shadows on the white snow. In the kitchen, she had a small pine box with a cigarette inside it and on the glass cover of the box was printed hätätilanteessa tauon lasiv — in case of emergency break glass. I wondered what that cigarette was doing in that box…

Obj. 4 Naomi Zouwer, *Ric-rac and ribbons from my Lappi doll's hat*

3 Exploring heritage — field research in Finland and the Netherlands

To further my research into the social role of objects, to better understand my heritage and to contextualise my research on still life painting, I conducted field research in Europe in July 2016. My project led me to my parents' countries of birth, Finland and the Netherlands.

While there, I investigated works of art that used real objects as well as painted realistic depictions of objects and textiles in lush still life. In Finland, I concentrated on the work of celebrated artist Ismo Kajander whose mixed media contemporary art reflects my family's domestic heritage. In the Netherlands I researched the work of Henri Matisse (1869-1954) concentrating on his depiction of textiles in paintings. My interest in domestic objects in representational painting led me to examine works focusing on traditions of still life painting. This included painters such as Adriaen van Utrecht (1599-1652) and Pieter Claesz (1597-1660) from the seventeenth century Dutch Golden Age of still life. The Rijksmuseum collection in Amsterdam was of particular interest; there, I also became enchanted with the doll's house of Petronella Oortman (1656-1716).

This chapter examines how these artists used materiality, objects, stories and textiles to make works of art, and their effect on my interpretation of the narratives within the works and how they relate to my practice. The works discussed are varied but relate to my over arching question: How can painting and textile techniques be used to examine the social role of small domestic objects and their ability to tell stories of belonging and migration? Through the works in this chapter I consider how objects can be used to create works of art that deal with identity and belonging; how pre-used objects can represent personal and collective meanings; ways symbolism of objects can function as a story-telling device; how artists combined painting and textiles in historical works, and finally, how the scale of an object influences the reading of an art work

When I arrived in Helsinki in the northern summer, I was pleased to be in my mother's country, but I was not a tourist and was working to understand my connection to Finland and make sense of my past and my present. I was drawn to the contemporary art of Ismo Kajander. Born in 1939, Kajander is regarded as "a great reformer and pioneer of Finnish art".[1] His work includes mixed media, painting, ready-mades, assemblages and collages and was influenced by Dadaism and Neorealism. Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art presented his retrospective exhibition *Ismo Kajander Anartisti,* in July 2015; it included works from his early career in the 1950s until the present. Anartisti is a play on the words artist and anarchist as his work is concerned with political and social commentary.[2] For me another important aspect of his works is its sense of humour and wit. His use of playful combinations of pre-loved toys, functional domestic objects with furniture and layers of collage and painted elements result in engaging, humorous and thought-provoking work.

Four Seasons Suite, Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter 1975-1992 (Fig. 3.1) is comprised of four large, pre-used shovels made of wood and metal and painted and transformed into an engaging artwork. Three of the four shovels are displayed with their handles up ready for use, with only one of the group turned upside down. The simple device of showing one shovel facing in the opposite direction to its companions activates the composition.

1 *Ismo Kajander Anartisti:* Helsinki, Nykytaiteen museo Kiasma, 2015, 7.

2 The exhibition curated by Eija Aarnio from Kiasma and the catalogue essay written by Art Historian Leena Ahtola-Moorhouse.

Kajander uses objects in his work to represent personal and collective meanings.[3] A shovel is something that an international audience can relate to. Using a worn and used object, gives the work an inherited sense of history. Kajander regularly uses objects from his family archive stating that:

Fig. 3.1 Ismo kajander, *Four Seasons Suite, Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter 1975 – 1992.*

> Objects are life's memory sticks. I like to smuggle family-related artefacts into my art. My sister's doll Sinika - or what's left of her - has been lying on my shelf for decades. That doll is so charged with meaning that nothing I come up with seems to do her justice. Other times, two or three objects seem to virtually levitate and connect. All I need to add is a drop of glue. Sometimes even I am surprised by how it happens.[4]

Kajander's work resonated with mine, in multiple ways; in my use of my families' archives to tell stories and evoke memories, and in the use of painted images overlaid onto pre-loved objects.

On returning to the studio I painted a miniature of my mother and grandmother based on a photograph of them standing in front of the Ainslie Migrant Hostel, in Canberra, Australia in 1956 (Fig. 3.2). In the photograph, they stand in front of one of the main residential buildings for new arrivals to Canberra (Fig. 3.3). The setting is distinctly Australian filled with gum trees. It is winter, I know this because my grandmother is wearing her woollen dress from Norway and she told me that she was the coldest she had ever been in her life, and she was from Lapland in the Arctic Circle. I painted onto a plate to reinforce the domestic connection and evoke memories of time passed. The palette was monochromatic, only raw umber and white, which alludes to the black and white photograph and contrasts with the soft pink and gold floral pattern on the crockery. Susan Stewart describes the effect of miniatures – the diminutive scale of people "skews the time and space relations"[5] – and the figures I painted appear to be floating, suspended in time.

3 ibid.
4 Ismo Kajander, *Esineiden Muisti* (trans. in memory of objects), catalogue insert, *Ismo Kajander, 6.*
5 Stewart, *On Longing,* 65.

Fig. 3.2 Naomi Zouwer, *Ainslie Migrant Hostel*

Fig. 3.3 Mummo (Grandmother) and mum aged seven c.1957

Encountering the work of Kajander motivated me to think about using objects in different ways and I began to consider working with installation techniques. Later in my candidature, I also experimented with found objects and discarded domestic embroidery sourced from opportunity shops.

The second part of my fieldwork was in the Netherlands. At The Oasis of Matisse exhibition at the Stedelijk, Amsterdam I examined how Henri Matisse's practice, like mine, combined textiles and painting techniques and represented textile patterns in paint. I also studied still life paintings, especially the symbolic use of objects and painting conventions used to render different textures, in particular, of textiles.

Textiles, garments, textures, patterns and colours often feature in Matisse's paintings. He collected textiles from his travels and from antique shops, referring to his textile collection as his "reference library", which he drew on for his paintings.[6] Throughout his long career, textiles occupied an extremely important place in his artistic vision. They gave him a deep appreciation for abstract patterns and a radical sense of how colour can function. Coming from what had been a centre of the textile industry since middle ages, and born into a family of weavers, Matisse had a lifelong fascination with fabrics of every kind and from every geographical region. His collection of fabrics, curtains, and costumes expanded constantly, producing incessant changes in the appearance of his studio.[7]

This exhibition motivated me to consider using my collection of textiles in combination with other objects, to make abstracted paintings. I pursued this idea and made the *Lineage Series*, discussed in Chapter 4.

6 *The Oasis of Matisse* (Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, 2015), 146.
7 ibid., 146.

Fig. 3.4 Henri Matisse, *Woman in a Blue Dress*

Still life paintings from the seventeenth century in the Netherlands utilise objects to stage contrived compositions that serve as a clear message, either about opulence and excess or, in stark contrast, the modesty of means, transience of life and insignificance of material objects. I chose three works in the Rijksmuseum to analyse: a *pronkstilleven*, a *vanitas* and a miniature building, a doll's house filled with exquisite miniatures.

I also visited places my late father had frequented in Amsterdam, where he went fishing, his hairdresser, and favourite coffee house. I was surprised and delighted when I got to share a room with his objects. This experience was crucial to my research on objects as storyteller; I thought about how my father's things reflected his personality, experiences, and beliefs, and formed his identity. Without his presence I nevertheless learnt much about him, prompting me to think about creating portraits of people through their things, which was something I would pursue in the studio.

The Rijksmuseum's *Banquet Still life*, 1644, by Adriaen van Utrecht proved to be an essential work because of his method of rendering textiles and textures and use of multiple contrasting and symbolic elements in a detailed overwhelming composition (fig. 3.5). The objects in this painting and these texures allow him to demonstrate his skill and virtuosity. They are carefully placed to create a balanced composition of colour and texture.

The objects, including violins and exquisite metal ware, were common in well to do houses in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. Fine objects and an abundance of food were typical subject matter for *pronkstilleven*, a genre of still life painting initiated by Dutch painters in the seventeenth century. The paintings show both the commissioner's wealth and Netherlands' healthy economy which was due to the success of the booming trade of The Dutch East India Company.

Fig. 3.5 Adriaen van Utrecht, *Banquet Still life*

Fig. 3.6 Naomi Zouwer, *Auditioning Objects*

Fig. 3.7 Pieter Claesz, *Vanitas Still Life with the Spinario*

What was more valuable to own, an exquisitely crafted object or a skilfully painted illusion of the object? Standing in front of this impressive painting and surrounded by real objects from the time this question proposed by Bryson was foremost in my mind.[8]

The painted objects are so life-like, their textures almost tangible. Phenomenologist Remo Bodei claims that "by transfiguring the object, art achieves a paradoxial enhancement of reality".[9] This is what I was trying to achieve with my work in the studio — to elevate and valorise my objects whether they were financially valuable or not, to make them valuable objects by painting them. *Auditioning Objects* represents my attempt to make an overwhelming composition with multiple contrasting elements, from a collection of objects made of different surfaces and textures (Fig. 3.6).

Another crucial work for my research was *Vanitas Still Life with the Spinario*, 1628, by Pieter Claesz, because of the strong symbolic use of objects to tell a story (Fig. 3.7).

In contrast to van Utrecht's *Banquet Still life*, Claesz's *Vanitas Still Life with the Spinario* is devoid of opulence and excess, with the focus being on the 'modesty of means'. The *vanitas* objects operate as symbols and have been employed to tell a story of the person, to create a portrait. They also remind us of the transience of life, which is the purpose of *vanitas* still life paintings. We see a snuffed-out candle, a human skull and other objects that belonged to the owner of the painting. Another difference is that the objects depicted are smaller than real life; their diminishing size reinforces the concept that material objects are insignificant.

In his analysis of Claesz's work, Bryson also points out *vanitas* paintings are a contradiction, as they reject material possessions but are at the same time material objects themselves: "...*vanitas* pieces may try to deny it, they cannot escape being pictures, that is, indulgences".[10] *Vanitas Still Life with the Spinario* with its dull colour palette, however, does not strike me as an indulgent material possession. However, the idea of creating an object from a painting of an object was a concept I wanted to explore further.

8 Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 125.
9 Bodei, *The love of Things,* 94.
10 Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked, 116.*

Fig. 3.8 Petronella Oortman's doll's house

Also at the Rijksmeum is Petronella Oortman's doll's house. A spectacular object which I responded to particularly because of the miniaturisation of the objects in it. The Oortman doll's house has historical significance (Fig.3.8). It is an example of how rooms were set up and used and what was used and where. It was a hobby of wealthy women to create doll's houses which today serve as a sort of time capsule. Of the doll's house in general, Susan Stewart notes there are "two dominant motifs: wealth and nostalgia. It presents a myriad of perfect objects that are, as signifiers, often affordable, where the signified is not".[11] Stewart observes that: "The reduction in scale which the miniature presents skews the time and space relations of the everyday lifeworld, and as an object consumed, the miniature finds its 'use value' transformed into the infinite time of reverie".[12] The sense of reverie the miniature created was appealing and I decided to try to make paintings that could create a similar effect. In Chapter 4 I discuss the paintings I made of tiny things from around my house.

Subsequently, in the Netherlands, I spent time scrutinising, photographing and sketching objects that belonged to my father who had passed away a year earlier. I did this while exchanging stories about his life with my brother and sister who knew him differently, as we had different mothers and lived in different countries. They grew up in the Netherlands, and I grew up in Australia. His objects were a mixture of Dutch, Australian,

11 Stewart, Susan, *On Longing,* 61.
12 Ibid., 65.

Indian and Asian, in origin functional and decorative objects. The collection included; the door knocker from his house, his hat, glasses, wallet, bag, kitchen canisters, fishing knife, cane, hip flask, perfume, harmonica, cd's, tapes, pastels and a barely used sketchbook, paintings by my grandfather, and a wooden statue of an African woman (Figs. 3.9, 3.10).

Fig. 3.9 Photo of my Father's objects

Fig. 3.10 Pages from my sketchbook documenting objects that belonged to my father

I documented his objects using the *Auditioning Objects* process of spending time them drawing them in pencil then adding colour. This gave me the opportunity to consider his life and how he interacted with these objects, and what I might be able to extract from that. Specifically: How did these objects reflect his personality and narrative of belonging? What memories were contained in them? Could objects alone create a portrait?

My family and I decided I would choose two objects to take back to Australia. But the question arose: how would I make my choice? I decided first on a painting my grandfather had made, as my father and I had both admired it we had a shared experience of it and its story. Second, I chose the door knocker from his house, because it was something he would have passed several times in a day in his comings and goings.

Conclusion

My investigations into the art of Kajander made me consider other ways of using my familial collection, the meanings inherent in pre-used objects, and the effect achieved when combined with other objects. I decided to make an installation using inherited and found objects to explore this idea further.

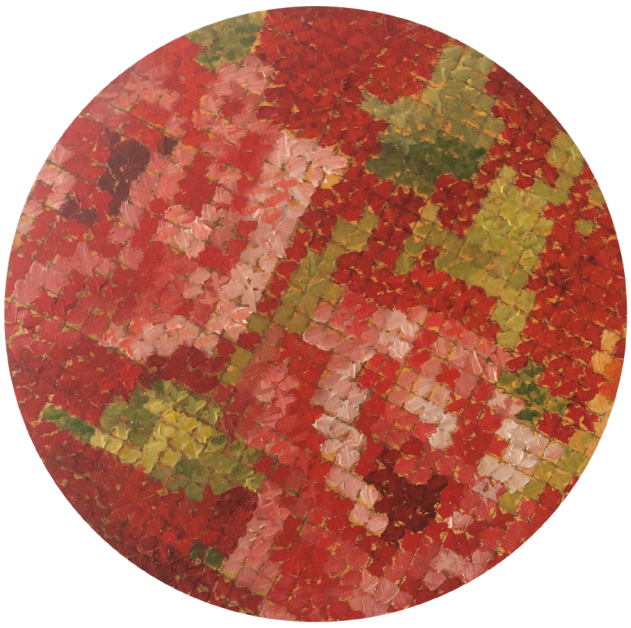
Using paint to render textures and in particular paint textiles was compelling in the still lifes and in the work of Matisse. I enjoyed Matisse's approach to his 'library of fabrics' as painting references and I decided I would pursue 'painting textiles' on my return to the studio.

Studying the works at the Rijksmuseum confirmed that stories could be told through representational paintings of objects. I compared and contrasted the use of objects and colour palettes in *pronkstilleven* and *vanitas* still life compositions and determined that the attraction was not wealth, extravagance and prestige. Instead, for me it was the use of symbolism. The realism achieved was also important and I responded to it strongly in the painting.

My reaction to Petronella's doll's house affirmed the appeal of intimate scale and domestic references and it also demonstrated to me that scale, oversized and miniature, can evoke a sense of nostalgia and skew our perception of time. It is an effective means of creating a heterotopic space.

The main outcome of my fieldwork was confirmation that my project was about the re-assessment of objects. Through documenting my father's belongings I was sure that objects can tell us much about our identity and help in the construction of our narrative of belonging. The process of re-assessing his 'things' drove me to consider creating portraits using only objects.

The outcomes of these ideas in the studio are discussed in Chapter 4.



Obj. 5 Naomi Zouwer, *Painting of embroidery*

Object 5 Lime or lions?

Do I feel more Finnish or more Dutch? I have thought about this a lot. The Dutch language is much easier to learn as it Germanic, like English, there are so many similar words, and often you can just put a funny accent on and get the word right! Like 'water' you just make the 'w' a 'v' and add an 'r' after the 'a' and say Varter… It is sort of right and Dutch sounding. In her thick Dutch accent my grandmother told me lots of stories of Holland before she migrated to Australia. How she lived above a lolly shop in The Hague, how she was a bastard, born out of wedlock, which was a scandal, how she looked after her half brothers and sisters during the war, and how the German soldiers threw her father into a pit of lions. Of course, it turned out that I misunderstood her, for ten years I had this notion that the German Soldiers, who did terrible things, also had pits of lions for torture purposes. Her father was thrown into a pit of lime, I never asked her to expand on this horrific story and now since she has died the details became lost.

I have spent much of life trying to reconnect with my heritage, with my parents' respective cultures. I've learned to cook Finnish food, how to speak Dutch - poorly. I've tried to immerse myself in the cultural habits when visiting their homelands. One of my favourite memories is from when I first visited Finland when I was nineteen. I spent a perfect day at a relative's summerhouse. We started early in the morning picking cloudberries, dressed in mosquito protective mesh and gum boots to walk through the swamp. We looked like astronauts - my gang of 80-year-old great aunties and me. My grandmother's sister was a practiced berry picker, and we filled bucket loads. Then while the sauna was heating up, we went fishing in a little tin boat. I had a simple rod with worms for bait - I just dropped the line in the water and seconds later pulled it out with a silver fish. My grandmother took the fish off and replaced the worm, we did this until we had full pails of fish for the BBQ lunch. Later that day we had a sauna, and I was introduced to whipping myself with a thatch of birch leaves to stimulate the skin, followed by a naked frolic in the lake…

I do prefer the Finnish aesthetic over the Dutch, as well as the food, and the sound of the language. Also, I like saunas and birch trees. So, I guess I feel more of a connection with Finland and I am trying to continue that relationship with my children to whom I have given Finnish names and who attend Finnish language and culture school once a week.

A friend said to me, 'we are sad to lose our connection with hundreds of years of history. But, at the same time, we are glad that tie has been severed, and we can create our own culture' - that's how I feel now - happy to be free from the shackles of tradition and neither Finnish nor Dutch.

4 Giving objects a new existence, honouring them and making them equal

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss works made as part of my studio research for exhibitions between 2015 and 2017. I begin with a discussion of my embroidered drawing, *Waratah Street c.1962*, 2015, and investigations into relating a narrative through drawing with thread. I reference *Illuminations*, 2010, by glass artist Wendy Fairclough and *The Tattooed Woman*, 2010, by Silja Puranen and discuss narrative concepts and methods used in other contemporary art. I then consider the three bodies of work made on my return from fieldwork for *Illusion to actual: painting through the realm of the object*, Foyer Gallery, ANU School of Art and Design.

First, building on my new knowledge gained from fieldwork through making the *Lineage series* I investigated representing textiles in painted form and combining textile patterns with object silhouettes to make abstracted still life paintings. Second, using textile techniques, I made work from reclaimed domestic embroideries that explored setting up a home in a new country. Homi Bhabha's notion of third space became relevant here as my hybrid cultural background was a driver and a reference point. I also explored links between my reclaimed embroidery and Louise Saxon's use of cutting up reclaimed embroidery in her recent work, and the historical use of doilies in Australia. The third body of work, using gouache on paper, comprised illustrative paintings of small objects and fragments of objects from my collection of things around my house. I aimed to highlight how, as Sherry Turkle states in *Evocative Objects*, "material culture carries emotions and ideas of startling intensity".[1] I developed use of the grid as an organisational tool, creating compositions that removed any hierarchy and allowed unexpected alignments to occur between objects.

I investigated the potential of tapestry weaving and combining images from the past with objects from the present in *Making Home.* This work further extends the dialogue between the two areas of my practice, painting and textiles.

Mid 2016 was a pivotal period in my project. I started using objects from outside my original starting point. I realised that through my object investigation I was constructing my present rather than reconstructing my past. I was curating and editing my life through the objects I chose to represent my world and my cultural identity. My project was not nostalgic. It involved the recovery and resuscitation of trivial objects and honouring them, making them equal and connecting them. In constructing my present through these objects, I was exploring personal and shared memories attached to the objects and their part in constructing my own home now.

During 2017 I continued making works exploring attachment to objects, and their capacity to embody and project multiple memories and meanings. This was the underlying theme in my works for *Dreaming of Remembering,* an exhibition curated by Grace Blakeley-Carroll for ANCA gallery. The works explored Jane Bennett's ideas of the agency of objects and I analysed my motivations for heading to "the call of things"[2] in a similar way to that of a hoarder.

1 Turkle, *Evocative Objects*, 6.

2 Bennett, "Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter".

Exhibition: The Contemporary Textiles Award 2015

Waratah Street c.1962 (Fig.4.1) is an experiment with combining images from a collection of slides of my Dutch family after they left Bonegilla and settled in Canberra. I had used these slides in the previous year to make *From a distance looks like flies,* 2015 and *Domestic Taxonomy,* 2015. The new work was created by overlapping a photograph of my grandmother and a group of children playing a party game in a suburban street, over a photograph of an arrangement of domestic objects I sourced from an opportunity shop. For contextualisation I chose objects that looked like they belonged to the 1960s and would have been found in houses at a similar time to when the photograph was taken. They included; a beer stein, a milk jug, egg cups and a kitsch shell shaped vase.

At this point I started to include objects outside my collection. I began to see the opportunity shop as a form of heterotopic space, drawing together disparate objects like a museum exhibition but without a curator. Juxtaposing items of mixed value, quality and condition. This phenomenon was observed by Catherine Waters, who states, "[t] he second-hand clothing shop is a form of heterotopia. Here, clothing still serves to mark types or classifications of gender and class; but as effigies of their former owners, jumbled side by side, these garments effect a promiscuous intermingling in defiance of rank and hierarchy".[3]

For *Waratah Street c.1962,* I used Photoshop to combine the images of my family and the photographs of the objects so that the photographed scene appeared inside the shape of the arranged objects. From the digital composition I made a watercolour painting (Fig.4.2) and then, based on the watercolour, I made the embroidery on a linen tea towel to reference home and domesticity. I chose to leave sections of the embroidery unfinished to reflect how fragmented a memory can be. This work became the stepping-stone to my painted works the *Lineage Series* that I will discuss later.

This idea of creating a layered pictorial narrative was sparked by seeing contemporary artist Wendy Fairclough's glass work *The Illuminations*, 2011, (Fig. 4.3) which was constructed from an image of people in action spread over multiple glass objects. To make this commissioned work for the Museum of Australian Democracy, Fairclough selected historical photographs of people involved in Federation celebrations from the Museum's collection.[4]

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3 Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words: The Social Life of Goods* (Routledge, 2008).

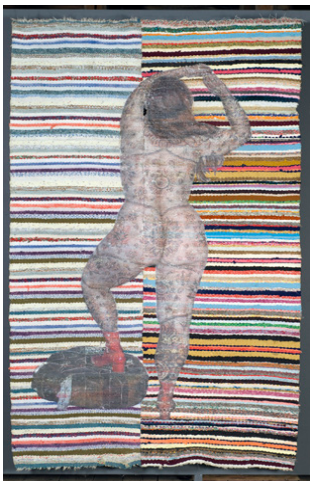
4 The Illuminations, "Museum of Australian Democracy", https://collection.moadoph.gov.au/objects/2011-0100/ (accessed August 7th, 2017).

Fig. 4.1 Naomi Zouwer, *Waratah Street c.1962*

Fig. 4.2 Naomi Zouwer, watercolour sketch for Waratah Street embroidery

Fig. 4.3 Wendy Fairclough, *The Illuminations*

Contemporary Finnish artist Silja Puranen was another reference point as she combines contemporary digital images of people and pre-loved and worn textiles to explore themes of modern cultural identity. In doing so she combines the past with the present.
Puranen says of her work and process that:



I use found materials, textiles with a history. I transfer digitally manipulated photographs on the worn-out surface, stitch and embroidery. My works combine contemporary technology with traditional slow handicraft. Hard and soft. The second hand domestic textiles represent shelter, memory, body and identity. The photographs tell stories about the relationship between the individual and society. The old blankets and carpets give protection and prestige to the human figs. printed on them. The pieces found from flea markets and attics tell their stories of lived life.[5]

Fig. 4.4 Silja Puranen,
The Tattooed Woman

Puranen's work *The Tattooed Woman*, 2010, (Fig. 4.4) resonates with me in part, because of the use of the traditional Finnish rag rug. I grew up with rugs like this; they are a symbol of my childhood and a conventional domestic textile used in Finnish homes. I was also drawn to her use of pre-loved textiles and layering of imagery that was exploring my work.

5 Silja Puranen, *The interface between cloth and culture, Transition and Influence*, University for the Creative Arts, http://www.directdesign.co.uk/testDD/transition_gallery/siljapuranenstatement.html (assessed 15th August 2017).

Simultaneously making a two-dimensional drawing out of thread and constructing a three-dimensional object for *Waratah Street c.1962*, appealed to both my love of objects and drawing. Art historian Rozsika Parker who talks about the psychological aspects of embroidery and suggests: "The processes of creativity – the finding of form for thought – have a transformative impact on the sense of self. The embroiderer holds in her hands a coherent object which exists both outside in the world and inside her head".[6] After discovering I could combine images and objects into one picture plane, as in Puranen's work, I was keen to test out the combination in a painted composition.

Textile artist Solveigh Goett writes that, "Narrative is not about facts, order and certainties, but about finding meaning and therefore closer to the truth of lived experience".[7] She continues: "The knowledge of memory is not a collection of empirical facts, but arises in the weaving together of felt and imagined experience".[8] For Goett, "collecting and narrative are both meaning making methods from the toolbox of everyday life".[9] This resonated with my core focus on collecting and narrative. Goett's essay alerted me to the writing of theorist Jens Brockmeier who discusses the effects of memory on narrative, and how we combine fantasy with fact in remembering. Brockmeier states that, "Narrative imagination seamlessly mingles the factual with the fictitious, the real with the possible; in fact, it fuses the real and possible with the impossible".[10] This brought me back to the touchstone at the beginning of my project; Borges' Taxonomy, which combines the real with the unreal, and cabinets of curiosity that do the same.

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6 Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch, embroidery and the making of the feminine*, (I.B.Tauris 2010) introduction, xx.

7 Solveigh Goett, "Material, memories and metaphors" in The Handbook of Textile Culture, ed. Janis Jefferies, Diana Wood Conroy and Hazel Clark (London, Bloomsbury, 2016), 125.

8 ibid., 125.

9 ibid., 126.

10 Jens Brockmeier, *Reaching for meaning, Human Agency and the narrative imagination*, Theory & Psychology (Sage Publications, 2009), 227.

Exhibition: Illusion to actual: painting through the realm of the object

After returning from fieldwork I was keen to test out new ideas in the studio, and the upcoming exhibition was an excellent opportunity to show my new works and get feedback. I decided to let the objects dictate the medium and to simultaneously make three bodies of work using various approaches. The exhibition *Illusion to actual: painting through the realm of the object* was with my PhD colleagues Anne-Marie Jean and Tiffany Cole. As painters, we were interested in exploring the terrain between two-dimensional and three-dimensional works, illusionistic painting techniques and objects.

Fig. 4.5 *Lineage Series*

Painting textiles

The first body of work explored composition and illusionistic painting using oil paint on board and extended my discoveries of combining images and objects begun in *Waratah Street c.1962*. Through *Lineage Series,* 2015, (Fig.4.5) I attempted to tell stories of time and place by using conventions of Dutch still life painting combined with my unique system of silhouetted objects filled with painted textile patterns painted in an illusionistic style. The textile patterns and textures evoked memories of my childhood and family.

This body of work was a huge departure from my figurative style. My aim with *Lineage Series* was to layer fabric embedded with my memories, in a similar way to Silja Puranen. The result was a series of six paintings.

I was beginning to go beyond the collection of objects and it felt good to move on from them. I scanned fabrics I had kept for sentimental value, a kimono my mum wore in the 1970s, beaded and glomesh handbags belonging to my grandmother and embroidered and cross-stitched garments that I had worn and loved. I then overlaid the fabric over the objects' silhouettes to make independent fabric objects that I could move around within the picture plane in Photoshop. Several compositions were based on conventional still life paintings.

Using an illusionistic style to painting I rendered shiny glomesh fabric and mimicked stitching in paint, applying each tiny thin brush stroke as if it were a thread. My new knowledge of stitching informed my painting just as my painting has informed my stitching for the embroidered works, *Waratah Street c.1962* and *Domestic Taxonomy*.

Fresh in my mind was the technical mastery of rendering textiles by Matisse, and Pieter Claesz and Adriaen van Utrecht. In the exhibition *Oasis of Matisse* at the Stedelijk in Amsterdam I had seen another important painting by George Hendrik Breitner (1857-1923), *The Red Kimono*, 1894, (Fig. 4.6) which combined painted textures including rugs, silks, cotton and fabric patterns. What appealed to me specifically was the way he combined various textiles with different patterns and textures into one harmonious picture plane. I wanted to achieve the same effect harmony with objects and pattern in my paintings.

I made six compositions of different sizes and rectangular formats, and within each one I moved the horizon line in the picture plane. The horizon line linked the paintings together at 1.5 metres from the floor in the gallery. I titled the works *Lineage Series*, playing on the dualistic meaning of the word lineage meaning both ancestral and line.

Fig. 4.6 George Hendrik Breitner, *The Red Kimono*

The second body of work explored re-telling migrant stories, specifically about my Dutch grandparents setting up home in Canberra. *The House and the Anvil*, dimensions variable, 2015, (Fig. 4.10) was made of reclaimed domestic embroidery. The aim was to make a large-scale narrative work from actual objects and I hoped that the materiality of the reclaimed fancy work would enhance the story I was trying to tell of migration and home making.[11] I was also exploring the silhouette in my paintings, so it was a natural progression to make silhouettes out of actual fabric. With this work I used reclaimed materials, reconfiguring them into the present to talk about an event from the past. This relates to Nikos Papastergiadis' view that: "It is not simply the positioning of the past hard up against the present, the old with the new, but also the reconfiguring of both".[12]

11 Fancy work is the term given to objects such as embroidered and crocheted doilies and tablecloths, milk jug covers, glass coasters and the assortment of cloths that were popular in domestic homes around the 1930s up until the 1960s when such items became less common.

12 Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday*, 52.

The House and the Anvil, and subsequent works *Home #1, #2 and #3,* were made of discarded fancy work that had made its way to opportunity shops through deceased estates, spring cleans or culling of objects as people downsize to live in smaller houses or move into aged care. I collected over one hundred pieces between 2015 and 2017 (Fig. 4.13). I bought the fancy work whether it was hand-made, machine-made, well used and even stained and torn. My collection grew to include examples of crocheted fancy work and filet crochet, which historically, was a faster and less expensive way of making lace than using lace bobbins, and embroidered patterns that became recognisable as common patterns from magazines and original designs. The stitches used included: French knots, running stitch, satin stitch, cross stitch, stem stitch (the list of stitches goes on). I also collected examples of shadow work embroidery and applique.

Fig. 4.7 Naomi Zouwer, *Lineage* (detail)

Fig. 4.8 *Lineage* in progress

Fig. 4.10 *The House and the Anvil in progress in the studio*

Fancy work was considered the work of women; mothers, daughters, and grandmothers. Moya Patricia McFadzean states in her thesis on the production of needlework for glory boxes that, "Needlework could provide a point of connection for young women being initiated into their prospective husband's female communities …a piece of fancy work... could act as both literal and metaphorical shared experience".[13] As well as being a mode for domestic use fancy work could also be sold and exhibited. From the 1930s patterns for fancy work could be found in pattern books, journals, and magazines like the *Australian Women's Weekly* in the Home Maker section. Well-known pattern designers of the time were Grace Valentine, Bertha Maxwell, Mary Card and Muriel Arnold. Images used in the designs were usually of European flowers, less common were designs of Australian flora.[14]

Fig. 4.13 Small portion of fancy work collected from 2015 – 2017

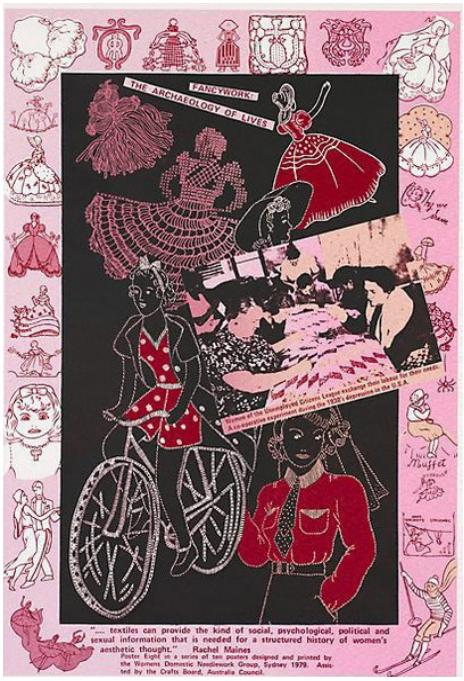
After the Second World War the production of fancy work began to dwindle which McFadzean attributes to "new interests and opportunities".[15] Women began entering the workforce and embracing new possibilities outside the domestic sphere. "By the 1960s, the domestic rituals which required an array of fancy work to adorn teapots, trays, plates and tables, were waning, which resulted in the relegation of these works of women's hands, to linen presses, or, sadly as time went by, the local opportunity shop".[16] The opportunity shop was, for me, the primary source of fancy work and it became habitual for me to scour shops on my way home from the studio or when on holidays.

13 Moya Patricia McFadzean, *Glory boxes: Femininity, Domestic Consumption and Material Culture in Australia 1930 - 1960 (*PhD thesis, The Australian Centre, School of Historical Studies, The University of Melbourne. 2009*),* 193.

14 Powerhouse museum, https://collection.maas.museum/object/362405 (accessed 15th August 2017).

15 Opcit.

16 McFadzean, *Glory boxes: Femininity, Domestic Consumption and Material Culture in Australia 1930 - 1960,* 287.



An important historical reference for my research was *The D'Oyley Show* that was held in Sydney in 1979. "The exhibition traced the development of Indigenous doily designs, predominantly in filet crochet, from the late nineteenth century to 1939 and so aimed to redress, at least partially, the imbalance in art history caused by the historic undervaluing of women's domestic fancy work".[17] Curated by Marie McMahon and Frances Phoenix, the two Australian artists were volunteer embroiderers on Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* and were influenced by feminist politics and the needlework historian, Rachel Maines.[18]

Fig. 4.14 Marie McMahon and Frances (Budden) Phoenix with the Women's Domestic Needlework Group, *Fancywork: the archaeology of lives*

To make *The House and the Anvil* I used textiles techniques to push the image of the empathetic figures into a larger work, hoping to create greater impact. The figures are slightly larger than human scale. Further, I wanted to investigate the idea of dislocating the subjects from the background as an analogy for my migrant history. The work, based on the same photo I used for *From a Distance Looks Like Flies*, and *Domestic Taxonomy*, was made by sewing several small embroidered doilies together, then carefully cutting out the silhouette of my grandparents holding the hands of their son in between them.

Fig. 4.15 Naomi Zouwer, *The House and the Anvil*

17 Jennifer Isaacs. *The Gentle Arts, 200 years of Australian Women's domestic and decorative arts,* (NSW, Lansdowne Press, 1987), 120.

18 As indicated by the text on the poster 'Fancywork: The Archaeology of Lives' which reads, 'Textiles can provide the kind of social, psychological, political and sexual information that is needed for a structured history of women's aesthetic thought'. Rachel Maines.#

Fig. 4.16 Louise Saxton, *Vanitas #2 The twitcher*

I wanted the work to appear fragile, so it was important the edges were raw and I did not reinforce them with a thick backing. I cut embroidered flowers out of tablecloths and bedspreads to make a garden space for the figures to walk through. To create the illusion of growth and connect the pieces with the exhibition space I placed some of the flowers so they appeared to be growing out of the floor. I fixed the pieces to the wall with small nails that looked like dress pins (Fig.4.15).

As I was installing the work in the Foyer Gallery several people stopped. They were intrigued and wondered if I had made the embroideries whereas, to me, it was obvious that they were pre-loved and made by other people. The work prompted questions like; how I felt about cutting up other people's work? Did I realise the amount of work that had gone into these embroideries that I was cutting up? The doilies were discarded and gleaned from opportunity shops around Canberra, so I did not feel that I was destroying family heirlooms. Rather, I felt I was rescuing them and giving them a new life in the public eye.

This is a similar process to Louise Saxton, who cuts embroidered motifs out of reclaimed fancy work and makes new images of endangered birds or symbols of transience like the skull that is synonymous with the *vanitas* still life painting tradition. Her practice, according to her artist statement has "centred on reconstructing detritus from the home… [and] has engaged primarily with the reconstruction of needlework", which she regards as a "silent collaboration with the anonymous original makers".[19] In *Vanitas #2 The twitcher,* 2015, (Fig.4.16) Saxon used reclaimed embroideries of flower and bird motifs to create an image of a skull. She cuts the colourful embroidered motifs out of the cloth, connecting the delicate pieces with pins and glue and placing the work on a wall.

19 Louise Saxton, "Louise Saxton About", http://www.louisesaxton.com/about/, accessed 9th August 2017.

Like Saxon, I worked with installation techniques and pinned my pieces to the wall. Where my work departs from Saxon's is in my use of the whole cloth and the embroidery. I construct the silhouette out of large pieces of fabric sewn together and utilise white space and the texture of the material revealing the foxing, aging and stains.

I continued to explore ways of using my domestic embroidery collection to make three-dimensional works of art. I was keen to experiment with sculpture and installation techniques for my next body of work, which I discuss in Chapter 5.

Fig. 4.17 Objects used in *Taxonomy of Small Things*

Fig. 4.18 Setting up objects for *Taxonomy of Small Things*

Fig. 4.19 Naomi Zouwer, *Taxonomy of Tiny Things*

My third body of work *Taxonomy of Tiny Things* (Fig.4.19) *Taxonomy of Small Things* (Fig. 4.20), built on the concept of knowledge systems, expands ideas of *Auditioning Objects* discussed in Chapter 2.

These works depicted palm-sized objects with the aim to make a story of place and home through small objects. The result was a significant breakthrough in my research as I was expanding my range of objects to include things in my present, belonging to my own family, my husband and my two children. I let go of trying to tell my parents' and grandparents' stories of migration and made a work about my present life. I started to take control of both the choice and combinations of objects. I was determining my cultural identity which, as Nikos Papastergiadis observes, "exists through a process of differentiation. Its form is shaped as much by what it excludes as that which it includes".[20]

I had surrounded myself with objects that were reminders of connections with people and places and these objects had seemed to represent my identity. This is reinforced by the writing of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton who state:

> ...the home contains the most special objects: those that were selected by the person to attend to regularly or to have close at hand, that create permanence in the intimate life of a person, and therefore that are most involved in making up his or her identity. The objects of the household represent, at least potentially, the endogenous being of the owner.[21]

Taxonomy of Tiny Things features thirty-six objects from my collection, which live in an old printer's tray that hangs in my dining room. The group consists of whole objects and fragments. Among the broken pieces are; a plastic doll's leg from the knee to the black school shoe, a pink porcelain pom-pom-esque ear from a figurine of a poodle, the legs and tail of a creature from a chocolate Kinder surprise toy, a single earring that I could not part with but could not wear either, a portion of a ruby red plastic hair comb with diamantes and several pieces of broken china and more. The whole objects include tiny plastic figurines from a terrarium, a guitar pick, a brass key, a bead, an Aboriginal flag pin, and a rusty thimble. Some of the objects belong to my children Elmi (born 2006) and Teijo (born 2008).

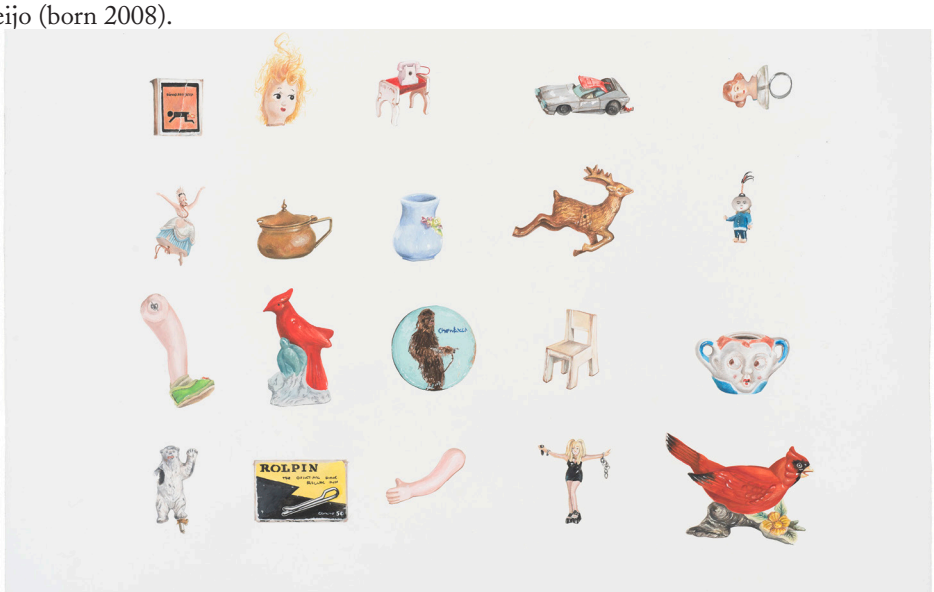


Fig. 4.20 Naomi Zouwer, *Taxonomy of Small Things*

20 Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday*, 51.

21 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things; domestic symbols and the self* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981), 17.

Taxonomy of Small Things contains twenty objects approximately five to ten centimetres in diameter that live in a small wooden box with six compartments and is to be found in my dining room. The objects are too big to store in the printer's tray, and consist of broken and whole objects from a badge depicting the Star Wars character Chewbacca on it, a plastic figurine of 1990s pop star Baby Spice, a porcelain cardinal bird figurine, a matchbox car excavated from the garden (an archaeological find!) and more.

Intrinsically linked to each object is a personal memory that has formed the attachment between the object and me. For example, the cover of a box of matches I kept from a romantic holiday in Prague, a leg of a doll I have had since my childhood, and an Elvis key ring I used when I drove an MGB sports car.

Taxonomy of Tiny Things and *Taxonomy of Small Things* were made from observational illustrative paintings of objects on a 1:1 ratio, traced directly onto paper with pencil and then painted with gouache. These two works built on *Trompe l'oeil* painting and rhopography as previously discussed. The objects were painted in a realistic style to show their texture and surface qualities and to elicit their genuine character. This style also alluded to printed encyclopaedia from mid-century. I did not include the object's shadow in these painting; I wanted the object to seem suspended in time and space and detached from the paper surface.

Through the act of painting these objects, I made sense of the world around me, in keeping with the view of Svetlana Alpers and early Dutch painters, who made sense of their world through observational painting.[22]

Grouping objects together from different times into one space and equalising them was enabled by using the grid, which implies a system of order, logic and an underpinning knowledge system. The grid gave objects a place and a relationship to each other without a hierarchy. Hannah Higgins states that: "As much as they [grids] produce opportunities for organisation, communication and control, they also offer occasions for analysis and, where the grid is broken, cultural upheaval and change".[23]

My aim with pursuing these three distinct approaches to making works of art was to explore different methods and techniques to draw stories out of objects. There were two common threads to my discoveries. First, my works rescued, recovered and resuscitated ordinary objects in a positive way that enabled me to construct the present for my children and me. Second, the grid was omnipresent, in the construction of my paintings of textiles, in the construction of the reclaimed embroideries and in my *Taxonomy Series*.

22 Alpers, *The Art of Describing*. 1st ed.
23 Higgins, *The Grid Book*, 10.

Exhibition: Petite

In 2016, I made a tapestry weaving, *Making Home* (Fig. 4.21). It was selected and shown in *Petite*, a show of selected small scaled textile works at the Wangaratta Art Gallery. With it I continued to explore ways of separating the subject from the background as an analogy for dislocation and migration and also of mobilising the image.

I also wanted to investigate further possible interpretations of the photograph of my grandparents, but this time chose to depict just a single figure, my grandfather. Instead of holding the hand of his son, as in the photograph, he holds a basket of flowers that I crocheted, and instead of looking down at his child he gazes at a strange small pink creature made of ceramic sitting on a patch of needlework and crocheted grass and flowers. I wanted to combine an actual object from the present with an image from the past. The focus is on the gaze between the man and the creature to accentuate the feeling of displacement.

Diana Wood Conroy considers how tapestry can work as a narrative medium for telling stories of migration and displacement and argues for a close relationship with tapestry "to text and narrative (textum, Latin means 'woven fabric')".[24] And in Solveigh Goett's research on narrative and metaphor in textiles, she observes that, "as we weave stories, spin yarns and embroider the truth, the special relationship between threads and word, text and textiles beyond joint etymological roots becomes evident in the metaphors we live by".[25]

Fig. 4.21 Naomi Zouwer, *Making Home*

Fig. 4.22 *Making Home* in progress

My experience as a painter transferred to the process of tapestry weaving. Colour blending was based on the same principles as painting, as were the proportions of shapes and angles in composition design. Wood notes that, "Although, of course, tapestry is a textile, is formed by interwoven threads, and much of its unconscious force as visual sign derives from its 'textility', this textility is hidden by the force of a traditional connection to painting".[26] With tapestry weaving, I discovered that I could combine painting and drawing to create objects, in a similar way to embroidery.

24 Diana Wood Conroy, "Tapestry and Identity in Australia" in Hemmings, Jessica. *The Textile Reader* (London: Berg, 2012), 224.

25 Goett, *"Material, Memories and Metaphors,"* 124.

26 Diana Wood Conroy, "An Archaeology of Tapestry: context, signs and histories of contemporary practice", Doctor of Creative Arts thesis, Faculty of Creative Arts (University of Wollongong, 1995), 227.

Exhibition: Dreaming of remembering

In 2017 I exhibited in *Dreaming of remembering*, a group show curated by Grace Blakeley-Carroll, which included painter Tiffany Cole, ceramicist Lia Tajcnar, weaver Daniel Edwards and myself.

At this time I was introduced to the writing of philosopher Jane Bennett and her theory on the relationship between hoarders and objects became helpful for thinking about my work in relation to the ways we accumulate 'stuff'. For the show I produced two small oil paintings on clay board, *Taxonomy of teeny weeny things, 2016*, (Fig. 4.23) and *Off Grid,* 2017, (Fig. 4.24) and Home #2 (Fig.4.28) and two needlepoint embroideries made from rescued embroideries from an opportunity shop, which I completed with neon and sparkly threads, titled, *Vibrant Matter* #1 (Fig.4.26) and *Vibrant Matter #2* (Fig.4.27).

Taxonomy of Teeny Weeny Things is comprised of 24 small, whole and broken objects. It includes doll and ceramic ornament limbs, a fragment of a plastic hair comb, a single pearl earring, tiny Star Wars figurines from my son's birthday cake, an antique miniature handbag pendant that says 'I love you' on a fan inside it, a tiny plastic pig and bull, a rusted metal top hat from a monopoly game and a red ceramic cardinal bird figurine.

Fig. 4.23 Naomi Zouwer, *Taxonomy of Teeny Weeny Things*

Fig. 4.24 Naomi Zouwer, *Off Grid*

Instead of being arranged in a formal grid structure the objects were organised in an organic and symmetrical pattern around a central axis. This decision was influenced by early engravings of objects from curiosity cabinets of Dutch apothecary Albertus Seba (1665-1736) in the seventeenth century. He commissioned artists to record his collection of natural specimens through illustrations. Most of the compositions in the comprehensive folio were arranged on a straight grid, however, in a few illustrations the artists have arranged the objects to create an organic pattern. I decided to experiment with this compositional device by creating my own organic pattern, which I discuss in Chapter 5.

The composition for *Off Grid* was constructed from 15 small objects randomly thrown across the picture plane, then separated so that they would not overlap. This composition was painted from a lower viewpoint whereas *Taxonomy of Teeny Weeny Things* was painted looking directly over the top of the objects.

Fig. 4.25 *Off Grid* in progress

Fig. 4.26 Naomi Zouwer, *Vibrant Matter # 1*

Fig. 4.27 Naomi Zouwer, *Vibrant Matter # 2*

Vibrant Matter #1 and Vibrant Matter #2 are made from a pair of discarded and unfinished needle points of roses made out of wool on large sheets of Aida cloth that I found in an opportunity shop. I was compelled to buy these unfinished musty smelling pieces, rescue them and take them home. They sat in my pile of things for some time until I came across some neon embroidery floss and decided to finish them with contemporary colours and metallic fibres and contrast the organic flowers with geometric shapes. Whilst making these works I listened to Bennett's lecture "The Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter,"[27] and read her book *Vibrant Matter* and decided to title the works in homage to her and inert objects.

Fig. 4.28 Naomi Zouwer, *Home #2*

27 Bennett, "Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter".

In the centre of the exhibition was my three-dimensional work *Home#2*, a tower constructed from cream and white reclaimed lace doilies, tableware and collars from the late 1800 to the 1980s. Suspended from the ceiling it was 350cm tall and one metre wide. The audience could enter the tower and look out through the lace collars and sleeves that were conceived as portals connecting the outside with the interior. This was the second tower I had made. *Home #1* was a six metre tall tower made of embroidered doilies that I had been working on over the year, and which I had decided I did not want to show until my examination exhibition. I realised that showing the towers together would be something to examine further and that I would consider constructing a third tower, Home #3 to link them. I will discuss this in Chapter five.

Fig. 4.29 Naomi Zouwer, *Home #2* (detail looking up)

Conclusion

The artistic references discussed in this chapter were selected for their processes and techniques and less for their conceptual links to belonging and migration. However, the common element was a capacity for conveying narrative, an important aspect to my work. As a painter undertaking my research in the Textiles Workshop I was excited about learning new methods but had to determine which approaches were working and what had I discovered from my experiments? My extensive studio investigations meant I could analyse my attachment to objects and their capacity to embody and project multiple memories and narratives. But how well did these works address my research questions?

I had explored embroidery, tapestry weaving and sewing discarded domestic embroideries and lace work, combining inherited and found objects to make new objects. At this time I had to narrow down my working methods, and decide which works had the most potential to tell stories of belonging and migration.

Waratah street c.1962 was made at the point in my project where I began to include objects that had been discarded, that I had found in opportunity shops. To help tell my family stories I needed to include domestic objects from the same era as the photographs I was working with to create a tableau. While I felt that the embroidery was successful I also recognised that it was a literal interpretation of the ideas of memories and objects and I was keen to move into more complex and abstracted visual language.

*Lineage Serie*s was my foray into painting with abstraction. I took the device of overlapping images to make still life paintings of objects filled with patterned fabrics from my childhood. The painted textile fabrics were something to explore further, in the final works as it allowed me to combine different aspects of my migrant heritage through fragments of pattern. But I was eager to move out of the confines of the rectangle of the canvas or board. I began cutting out images from the canvas to make the *Puffies* and was still interested the way removing the background activated the object, as in *The House and the Anvil,* I felt the device worked well as an analogy for my migrant heritage.

Making *The House and the Anvil* showed me I could use found objects to make new objects that were positive and forward looking. In thinking about heterotopic spaces with this work I was compressing time and space by combining embroideries that together represented an accumulation of time and hours of stitching by anonymous women.

In Chapter 5, I discuss new directions, and delve further into third space theories and discuss their impact my final works.

My studio table 2017

Object 6 Plastic gorillas and play dough pizzas

I have been in my current house for nine busy years - the longest time I have been at one place. I have lived at more than thirty five addresses in my forty four years. My home is in a constant state of flux. We moved in when Elmi was a baby, and I was pregnant with Teijo. In the first years, there were baby gates at the bottom and the top of the stairs, cots, and change tables, high chairs, tiny clothes and squeaky baby toys, chewy rattles and baby blankets and wraps filled the small two story, yellow duplex. We had so much stuff; a massive three wheeler two baby pram, a stroller, a baby carrier, a baby sling, a bike chariot attachment, child car seats, booster seats… and tiny toys! As the kids grew the baby accessories were given away to friends or family or just put out onto the street in a desperate attempt to get them out of the house to reclaim space. My husband, much more ruthless and less sentimental than I am, would often walk around the house cramming toys of all sorts into a bag for charity. I would then scour through the bag to rescue pieces that I could not bear to let go or that I thought were parts of larger toys that the children would miss. My attachment to things was palpable; I felt physically ill when I saw a favourite thing shoved in a bag.

Obj. 6 Naomi Zouwer, *Plastic gorilla*

5 Arrival and recovery at a point where longing and loss are recuperated

Introduction

In my final year I came to see that my work had ceased to be about recollection and the past and was about the present; a time and space where I had agency in telling my family stories through my art practice. The final series of works discussed in this chapter contain elements of both the past and present but importantly also look to the future. In a similar way to the merging of temporal states the works embodied, I combine painting and textiles to create painterly embroideries and textiles rendered in paint.

The works I developed for my final exhibition are; the *Taxonomy Series, The mini encyclopaedias, Home #1, #2, #3 and The Under Glow.* They were carefully considered and made specifically for examination. I decided not to include experiments made to date but instead to make a new and coherent body of work that represented my investigation into ways painting and textiles could comminicate stories of belonging and migration.

The *Taxonomy Series* focuses on small personal objects to create portraits of my family members. Gaston Bachelard's writing on the miniature became relevant here, as he states small objects ask you to pay attention.[1] Madan Syrup was also relevant, suggesting that objects are "generators of love".[2] I further explored the potential of the grid as a compositional device and drew inspiration from the polar grid of doily patterns and illustrated items from Dutch seventeenth century cabinets of curiosities.

Using digital images from the *Taxonomy Series* I explored another knowledge system format, and published a set of mini encyclopedias. This idea came in part from Daniel Spoerri's book *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, 1960.

I explain how my painting *The Under Glow* took me back to my original starting point, working with observational painting techniques and oil paint, but also drew on textile structures. The result was a large composite work of many small paintings that filled the viewer's peripheral vision. The physical scale referred to a sense of time and space coming together in the one plane. I envisaged this as being similar concept to Borges' *The Aleph*, where all things in the universe come together to the same point in time. This idea is expanded on by Edward Soja in his concept of third space, which was a reference for my work. I also discuss further how my work draws from cultural hybrid theory and the third space articulated by Homi Bhabha.

While making *Home #1 and #3*, I analysed the connection between the underpinning grid structure of the reclaimed domestic textiles I had been using, and the taxonomy paintings I was making. I explain how I connect my painted objects with the three-dimensional structures via embroidery. I discuss the ideas of embodiment in creating three-dimensional immersive structures out of reclaimed embroidery and ideas related to the construction of a home.

1 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space.*
2 Sarup, "Home and Identity," 94.

Taxonomy painting series extended

Taxonomy of Small Things and *Taxonomy of Tiny Things* (Chapter 4) satisfied my desire to find meaning and understand relationships in my family through time spent with objects. However, I wanted to extend the use of objects as symbols to create portraits of my family members by painting their small objects into a grid system of organisation. My family comprises my daughter Elmi, my son Teijo, my husband Ross, born 1972, and myself, also born 1972. Branching out from our nuclear family I painted my mother Kaija, born 1950, and her mother Rauha, born 1927. On my father's side I made a painting of my father (1952 - 2014), and of his parents, Johannes and Hendrika, both of whom were born in 1927.

The objects from my memory museum were family keepsakes and curios, inexpensive things that were significant for memories. A pertinent context for my new research came again from Madan Syrup who writes:

> When I think of home I do not think of the expensive commodities I have bought, but of the objects, I associate with my mother and father, my brothers and sisters, valued experiences and activities. I remember significant life events the birth of children, their birthday parties...Particular objects and events become the focus of a contemplative memory, and hence a generator of a sense of love. Many homes become private museums as if to guard against the rapid changes that one cannot control.[3]

The objects I selected were all small often no larger than the palm of an adult's hand because I wanted to explore the intimacy inherent in small objects. Bachelard states, "In looking at a miniature, unflagging attention is required to integrate all the detail".[4] I worked on a one-to-one scale and once again some objects I painted were whole and others just fragments.

Fig. 5.1 Naomi Zouwer, *Taxonomy of Teijo*

Fig. 5.2 Naomi Zouwer, *Taxonomy of Elmi*

3 ibid, 94.
4 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 159.

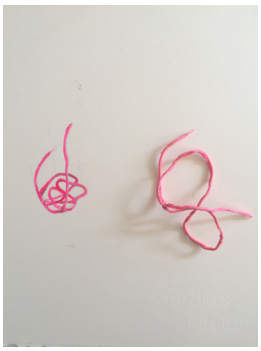


Fig. 5.3 setting up objects for *Taxonomy of Me*

Fig. 5.4 Painting objects on a 1:1 scale for *Taxonomy of Me*

In my *Taxonomy Series* and painted doily pattern installation, *The Under Glow*, which I discuss later, one of my aims was to stir a sense of wonder by painting small objects. The effect was one I had experienced viewing Petronella Oortman's doll's house in the Rijksmuseum on my fieldwork. Bachelard says that, "Miniature is an exercise that has metaphysical freshness; it allows us to be world conscious at slight risk. And how restful this exercise on a dominated world can be! For miniature rests us without ever putting us to sleep. Here the imagination is both vigilant and content".[5]

Fig. 5.5 Naomi Zouwer, *Taxonomy of Me*

Some objects I painted were toys that belonged to my family members and me. Toys attract me for their humour, which is often compounded by their small scale. Bachelard also says "the tiny things we imagine simply take us back to childhood, to familiarity with toys and the reality of toys".[6] So, on the one hand, the miniature can return us to our youth and at the same time highlight the reality toys symbolise, which is that you are not a child anymore.

5 ibid., 161.
6 ibid., 149.

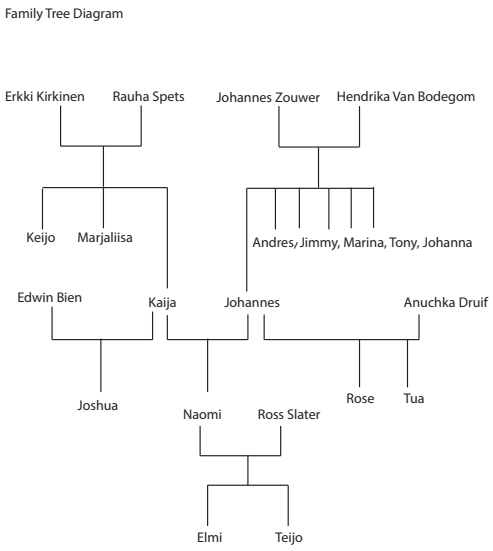


Fig. 5.6 Diagram showing four generations of my family.

Fig. 5.7 Albertus Seba, colour plate engraving

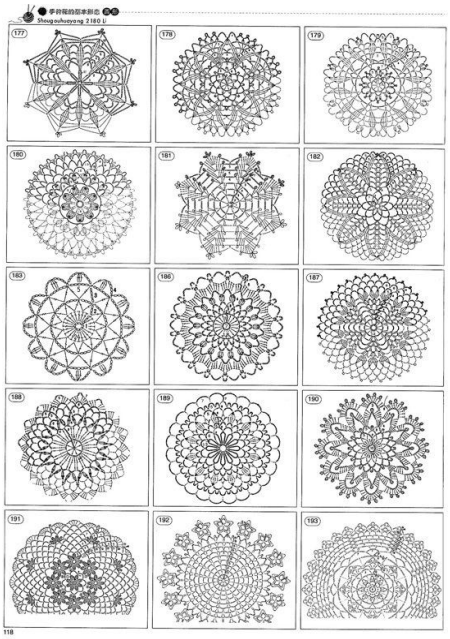


Fig. 5.8 Doily patterns as templates for compositions

Fig. 5.9 Naomi Zouwer, *Taxonomy of Kaija*

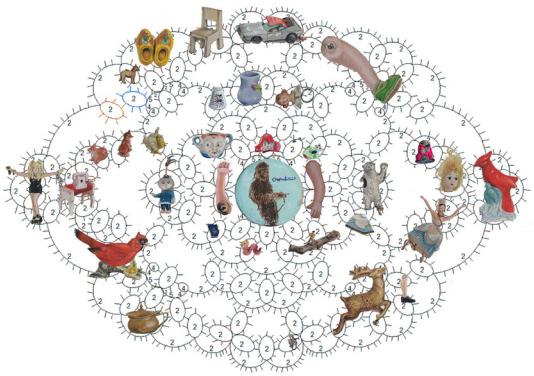


Fig. 5.10 Naomi Zouwer, Arranging objects over a doily pattern, digital composition

Fig. 5.11 Naomi Zouwer, Arranging objects over a doily pattern, digital composition

Fig. 5.12 *Taxonomy of Ross* in progress, arranging objects on concentric circles

Fig. 5.13 *Taxonomy of Oma and Opa* in progress, arranging objects on a cross

Grids and polar grid patterns

As discussed previously the grid solved my dilemma of how to connect objects and establish egalitarian relationships between them, and how to address the problem of lost space I encountered in my earlier cut-out work.

There is no clear hierarchy in a formal grid. Top and bottom rows might suggest levels of importance, but all objects are given equal space and consequently no object is greater than any other. Yet arranging them in a grid structure connects all the objects. As Rosalind Krauss claims, "[i]nsofar as its order is that of pure relationship, the grid is a way of abrogating the claims of natural objects to have an order particular to themselves".[7]

The grid also suggests a system like a code. Because of this, the paintings read like an alphabet. Each object could represent a letter, and be arranged in any order to communicate something. Krauss states, "It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature. In the flatness that results from its coordinates, the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface".[8] The other aspect that the grid highlighted for me was the compression of time and space.

I discovered that the grid system provided an animating feature in my works which relates to Hannah Higgins' view that: "Grids and the material they contain are in a constant state of variation. Their evolution gives them animating features of living things, and suggests the possibility of seeing them as individuals caught in their life cycles".[9] The small objects were not fixed to the paper surface with a shadow, and the grid suggested movement within the ordered structure that was natural and anti-natural over the single surface and created its world and rules.

Illustrations from Albertus Seba's cabinet of natural curiosities became relevant again. Shells swim around the page into a formation which resembles two birds in front of a symmetrical design that references Baroque home decoration (Fig.5.7).[10] This was a springboard for creating new taxonomy paintings not reliant on the formal grid. I started to look at the polar grid patterns in doilies I had been collecting and using in my work. I began by drawing the simple underlying geometric patterns of doilies, and then placed my objects on the guidelines to create compositions, photographing them as I went. To make the portrait of my mother, *Taxonomy of Kaija,* I organised her objects according to the symmetrical pattern of a doily that made four circles with a central axis. This compositional device provided all the elements the formal grid offered, but it also allowed for more movement. This discovery led to the creation of *The Under Glow*, the large wall installation based on a doily pattern.

The *Taxonomy Series* spoke about material culture and contemporary culture as it combined objects of varying degrees of value including small plastic objects and antique objects made from more precious materials. An intriguing aspect of the work was bringing into question the reason these objects been chosen? Who owns them? Is it one person's collection or multiple peoples'? As a group the objects served as evidence of life. They had an archaeological feel in the way they were presented as if they had recently been excavated and were to be examined. Jane Bennett notes that on archaeological digs exquisite attention to detail is paid to a tiny shard of an object. Here there are no people to tell the story only what is readable from the material.[11]

7 Krauss, *Grids,* 9.
8 ibid, 9.
9 Higgins, *The Grid Book*, 10.
10 Albertus Seba, *Cabinet of Natural Curiosities* (Taschen), 373.
11 Bennett, "Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter."

Fig. 5.14
Paula Zuccotti,
A day in the life of Anna, 2 years old, Tokyo

The Taxonomy Series presented material in this same way. Objects were the storytellers, and one of the main readings that came through the paintings was a sense of making a home for lost objects, a displaced objects repository arranged and controlled by me.

Another artist interested in creating portraits out of objects and arranging those objects in a grid (Fig. 5.14) is photographer Paula Zuccotti whose project, *Everything we Touch: A 24-Hour Inventory of Our Lives* is about "future Archaeology".[12] She asks questions related to my research; "How do our favourite things reveal our hopes and fears? Can objects tell the story of our lives?"[13] She was curious about how people in the future will learn about our lives from the objects and possessions we leave behind.[14] While Zuccotti uses similar compositional devices to mine to arrange her objects, she is not restricted by their sizes in the way I am. Zuccotti's images are collections of objects touched by the subject of the portrait during a 24 hour period. It is fascinating to see the amount of objects in Anna, two years old Tokyo (fig. 5.14) compared to the image of a nun who touches far fewer objects in the same 24 hours.

Mini Encyclopaedias

Fig. 5.15 Mock-up of *mini encyclopaedias*

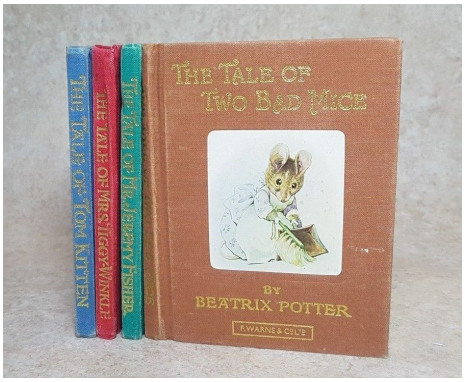


Fig. 5.16 The Tales of Beatrix Potter, looking at colour, material quality and scale for my own mini books

12 "Paula Zuccotti", http://paulazuccotti.com/The-Book-Project, accessed 6th February 2018.
13 ibid.
14 ibid.

Another piece in my final exhibition is a set of small books of digitally reproduced images drawn from my archive of objects, which I see as small encyclopaedias (Fig. 5.15). They are presented on a shelf, to be read like an encyclopaedia, but have no words, and no story as such but instead they are a compilation of fragments of stories associated with the objects. The scale of the books is based on the Beatrix Potter classic children's book set which includes *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*[15] which were important to me as a child (Fig. 5.16).

Artist Daniel Spoerri demonstrates how using text and objects within a knowledge system framework can generate engaging narratives.[16] Spoerri and my books share an object-oriented perspective, although in mine the objects are the sole language (Fig. 5.17).

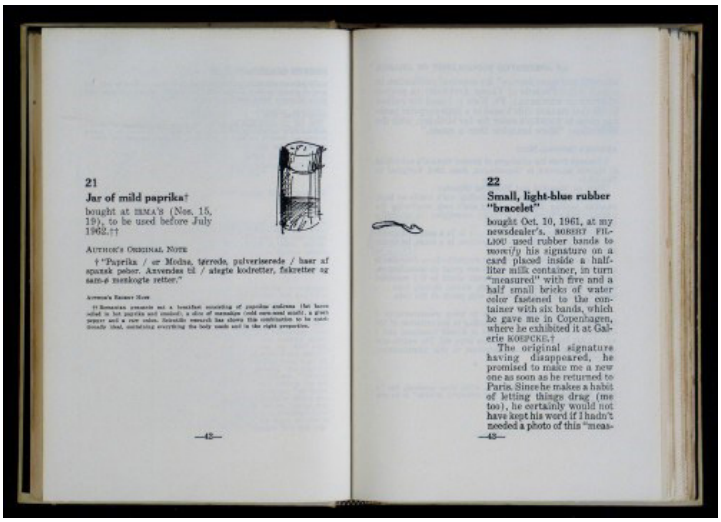


Fig. 5.17 Daniel Spoerri, *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*

15 Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (London: F.Warne. co., 1902).

16 (re-annotated version) with illustrations by Roland Topor with additional annotations by the translator- English translation by Emmett Williams published by something Else press in New York 1966.

Fig. 5.18 Ilya Kabakov, *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*
Figs. 5.19 , 5.20, 5.21, 5.22, 5.23 Fragments from *The Under Glow* in progress

The Under Glow

My final painted work includes a constellation of small paintings arranged into a complex doily pattern made from eighty pieces of round, oval, cross and tulip shapes laser cut out of plywood (figs. 5.19,5.20, 5.21, 5.22, 5.35). It was made of painted objects and textile patterns from around my home belonging to my family and me. I painted the backs of the plywood pieces in neon paint and hung them, leaving a gap so the neon coloured paint could reflect on the white wall and glow to create a sense of vibration and life emanating from the object. The colour palette for *The Under Glow* is partly inspired by my embroidery work *Vibrant Matter # 1* of the same time.

With this work I was also able to collage my figurative object painting with fabric textile painting, an idea I developed *The Lineage series.*

This composition enables me to represent the complexity of my experience and it also resonates physically with Bhabha's notion of third space theory. It brings together all of my objects, from my memory museum of the past – from the first space of my home with my multi-cultural migrant parents and extended family and from the second space of my home-made with my husband and children in the present. They are assembled in the one space, creating a new third space and a new composite object. Bhabha does not see new work based on past and present as a continuum of the past, nor as nostalgia, but as a necessity of living, in its continual and innovating renewal of the combined past and present.[17]

At this point in my project, my research into third space theory turned to Edward Soja. There were parallels between his references and mine; heterotopic space, the writing of Borges, combining real and imagined in the one space, and Bhabha's cultural hybrid theory. In his essay "The Trialectics of spatiality", Soja describes this third space as an eclectic collective repository for everything; from projections of the real and of the imaginary to everyday life and history.[18]

Another aim of *The Under Glow* was to reflect Borges' concept "The Aleph".[19] I wanted to develop the potential to affect the viewer so they would feel absorbed in the collection of objects suspended in space. I also aimed to paint the objects with such detail that they all appear in focus on the one picture plane.

Like Borges, Ilya Kabakov makes work about archives and the accumulation of 'stuff' that holds connections to the past. Kabakov's story, *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away,* 1977, explores this idea and includes an illustrated quote (Fig. 5.18) that resonates with *The Under Glow,* which presents objects as 'reflections and fragements of culture.'[20]

The small shapes each contain a painting of an object or textile pattern and are arranged in a polar grid or doily shape. They form a constellation of stars echoing the words of Walter Benjamin who states, "...Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars". [21]

17 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 10.
18 Edward W. Soja, "Thirdspace Toward a New Consciousness of Space and Spatiality" in Karin Ikas and Gerhard Wagner, *Communicating in the Third Space*, (London, Routledge, 2009), 54.
19 In the story, the Aleph is the point at which everything in the universe comes together at the one place and time.
20 Ilya Kabakov, *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away,* 1977, in Charles Merewether, The Archive, (London, Whitechapel, 2006), 35.
21 Walter Benjamin, *The origin of German tragic drama*, Trans. John Osbourne (London: Verso, 1998).

Home #1, #2 and #3

I revisited aspects of *The House and the Anvil,* 2015 because of the potential to use space more effectively, including the space of the gallery. I experimented with reinvigorating discarded objects in an installation space, and constructed a three-dimensional shelter using doilies sourced from opportunity shops.

The three-dimensional constructions represent a number of home-related concepts including; a tower from a fairy tale, a cubby house made from things out of the linen cupboard, a temple to worship in, a stupa, an imaginary home, make do house, a soft place, a gentle place and a comforting space. Architect Juhani Pallasmaa believes experiencing art and architecture draws on our ability to project and identify through our embodied existence. This ability triggers our animistic responses culminating in an emotional connection to the object in which we perceive beauty or ugliness through our own embodied experience.[22]

Home #1 is made from discarded domestic embroidery. *Home #2* is made from discarded lace including doilies, tablecloths and collars as discussed in the previous chapter. *Home #3* combines the materials from the first two towers and is constructed from domestic embroidery and lace. In some parts of Home #3 I have cut out the original embroidery and replaced it with my own. The images for my embroidery came from my archive of objects and *Taxonomy Series*. This did two things. It connected the works and it asserted my agency over the discarded objects, making something new from the past, creating my narrative.

Fig. 4.24
Naomi Zouwer, *Home prototype*

22 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*. (United Kingdom: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 63.

Fig. 5.25 Detail of embroidery in progress

Fig. 5.28 *Home #3* in progress

Fig. 5.29 *Home#2, #3 and #1* in progress in the studio

Carolyn Eskdale, Do-ho Suh and Montien Boonma were references for my three-dimensional works as they have explored immersive three-dimensional environments in different ways. Eskdale's *Room 8.96*, 1996, and Suh's *Wielandstr. 18,* 2011, use textile techniques to create sheer and transparent walls and spaces. With my constructions I wanted to achieve the same effect of creating a space with no hard barriers, soft on the inside and outside. The shape and spaces of my constructions were not as defined as theirs, and presented a more childlike experience, like a cubby or tent made of items from the linen cupboard. As with Boonma's *Temple of the mind: sala for the mind*, 1995, I created contemplative spaces that invite the viewer inside.

Textile practice has expanded in Australia, due to travelling exhibitions such as the the Tamworth Textiles Fibre Biennial and the more recent Tamworth Textiles Triennial,. The shows have have opened up to include artists from other fields of practice and have helped popularise textiles as a contemporary medium. *Open House: Textiles Triennial 2017*, curated by Glenn Barkley, was an example of this. It included Raquel Ormella who has come to textiles from a multimedia background and enjoys tactility, sheen, texture in her work. Joy Ivill is another artist who maintains a painting practice alongside her textiles.

Fig. 5.30 Carolyn Eskdale, *Untitled room 8.96*

Fig. 5.31 Do Ho Suh, *Wielandstr. 18, Berlin*

Fig. 5.32 Montien Boonma, *Temple of the mind: sala for the mind*

Ormella uses embroidery like paint. Using multiple little stitches she layers colours and fills areas with fine threads to make works that respond to contemporary social and political issues. Ormella uses her stash of hoarded threads and her palettes are determined by what she has collected. Her work resonates with mine through our interest in the collection and attachment to objects and 'stuff'. Her works, like mine, construct narrative; though she uses words and I do not.

Like Ormella, Ivill uses text in her narrative works, embroidering recollections of funny personal stories about her boyfriend and an acid trip she took in the 1970s. She employs traditional embroidery stitches and bright coloured threads and works between painitng and textiles, each influences the other.

Looking at how artists tackle concepts of identity through objects led me to examine the works of Tony Albert, a contemporary Aboriginal artist with cultural heritage from the Girramay and Kuku Yalanji people. He reinterprets collections of kitsch domestic objects in particular 20th century Aboriginal memorabilia or souvenirs which he calls Aboriginalia. Albert cuts up, draws and paints on ephemeral objects, such as postcards and posters, to make political installations about Aboriginal identity and representation of Aboriginal culture in post-colonial Australia. His messages are confronting, however his presentation has an optomistic element. Sally Brand writes that "optimism is a key strategy throughout Albert's practice...".[23]

Patrick Pound uses collections in museums and archives to create new stories from historical sources to reshape personal and collective identity. He combines high art with objects from popular culture collected from the internet. He attempts to equalise objects by placing something humble next to a significant item. Pound says of his displays that "sometimes the things remain the same, but together, in combination, they set us thinking about something else. While some things seem to gain from the transaction, other maintain their airs, remaining imperious or impervious to it all. Some things lighten up, some do not. Some might even gain a little gravtis in this tragicomic context". [24]

23 Sally Brand, *Dark Heart, 2014 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, edited by Nick Mitzevich. (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2013).*

24 Patrick Pound, "A conversation: Patrick Pound and Maggie Finch", *The Great Exhibtion,* (Victoria: NGV, 2017), 16.

Works together

The final show brings painting and textiles into conversation with each other and addresses the inevitable tensions, possibilities and resonances that arise. This is achieved through four bodies of work: the *Taxonomy series*, the set of mini encyclopaedias, the constellation of painted objects and textiles and the three towers *Home #1, Home #2* and *Home #3 installed* (Fig.5.33). They create object stories that allow for longing and loss to be recuperated.

My journey and agency is evident in the assemblage of objects in recuperative and positive ways. Together the works address personal stories of migration and an expression of dislocation known through my parents but transformed into first generation hopefulness. I do this through painting small scale objects and fragments of textiles that ask you to pay attention, and by rescuing discarded textiles to make a transformative immersive installation.

The final show for examination grew out of extensive experimentation. Thinking through materials to address ways in which textile techniques and and painting could be used in tandem and separately to examine the social role of objects and their ability to tell stories of belonging and migration. My journey and agency is evident in the assemblage of objects in recuperative and positive ways. Together the works address personal stories of migration and an expression of dislocation known through my parents' experiences, but transformed into first generation hopefulness. I do this through painting small-scale objects and fragments of textiles that ask you to pay attention, and rescuing discarded textiles to make a transformative immersive installation.

The *Taxonomy Series* presents small keepsakes and curios, painted with accuracy and detail, which are arranged like museological artefacts to create portraits of my family members (Fig.5.35). The paintings read like finds from an archeological dig. The viewer is invited to piece together a story of the former owner - whether they were male or female, a child or adult. What was their heritage? Evidence of migration is in the objects that are distinctly Dutch and Finnish, such as the miniature clogs. Why are these objects grouped together? *The Mini Encyclopedias* present the objects in a different format (Fig. 5.34). The book, by its nature, alludes to a story which involves a title, a character and series of events. Events are linked to the objects, the character is the owner of the items that are obviously personal. My installation *The Under Glow* creates a shimmering sensation that is quasi-religious in its halo form (Fig.5.36). Objects from the everyday are transformed and their significance as signifiers of attachment is raised.

Psychologist Alice Miller's view is relevant here for how I felt about the conclusion to my project;

> Where there had been only fearful emptiness or equally frightening grandiose fantasies, an unexpected wealth of vitality is now discovered. This is not a homecoming, since this home has never before existed. It is the creation of home.[25]

25 Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self,* (New York, Basic Books, 1997)

Fig. 5.33 *Home #1, Home #2 and Home #3* installed

Fig. 5.34 *The Mini Encyclopaedias* installed

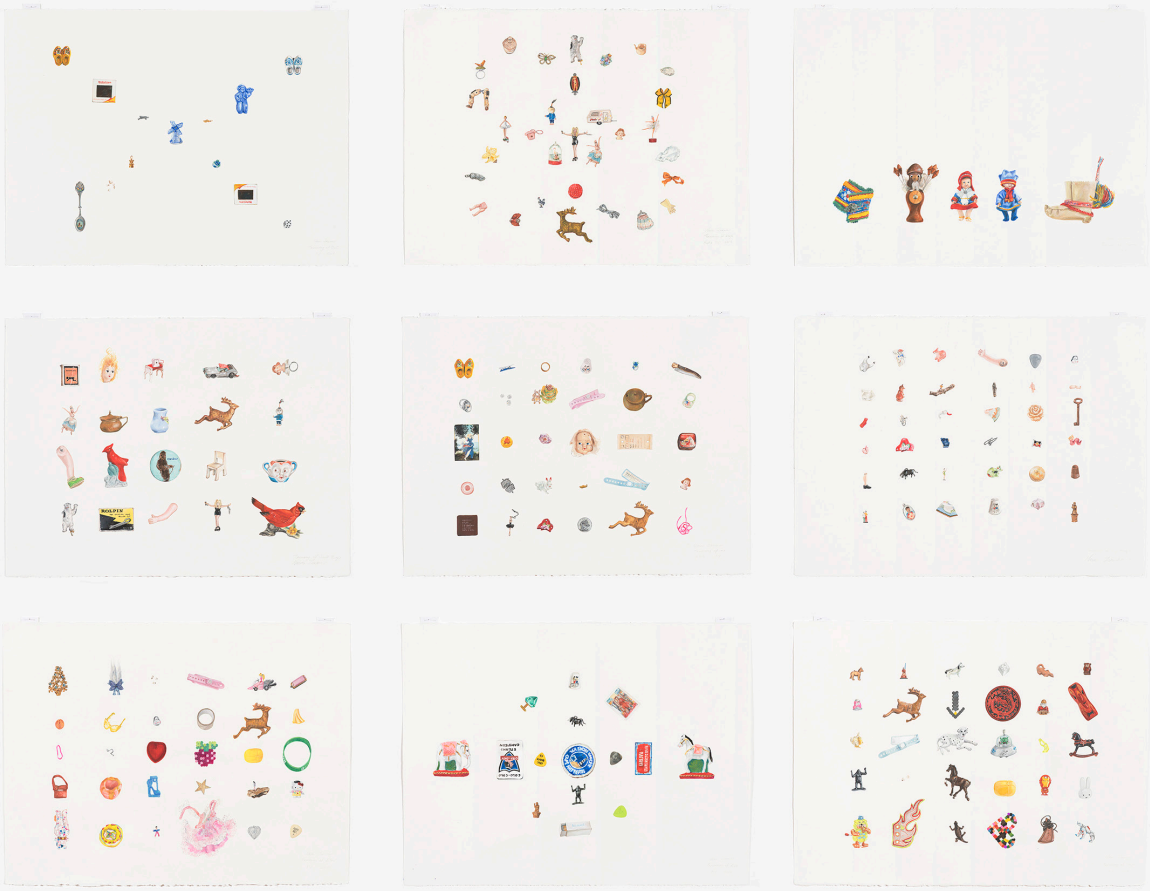


Fig. 5.35 *Taxonomy Series,* gouache on paper, 65cm x 76 xm each, 2015-2018

Fig. 5.36 *The Under Glow*, 84 pieces, oil on panel 250cm x 250cm 2018

Conclusion

In the beginning of my research project I set out to understand why the depiction of objects has been central to my art practice and how 'things' might be related to cultural hybridity, heritage, identity and sense of belonging as a first generation Australian. The question that drove my reseach was: how can painting and textile techniques be used to examine the social role of small domestic objects and their ability to tell stories of belonging and migration?

My methodology involved re-contextualising objects from three generations of my migrant family's archive, using painting and textile media to create new narrative. The objects initially represented a sense of loss and nostalgia but through processes of retelling and re-presenting, I arrived at a position where specific family stories became my own. The collections and recollections were given an importance and collective life in the present day through my painting and embroidery.

My focus moved to the present as I started to work with objects from my daily life. They included things belonging to my children and husband, as well as discarded domestic embroidery that I collected during the the program. Selecting objects from my contemporary world and structuring the taxonomies underlined my agency in telling my family story.

A significant result of my practice-led research was the recognition of the central theme of loss and recuperation. This was, in part, illuminated through theoretical underpinnings, that came from Michel Foucault's ideas of heterotopic space, forms of space where many places or times can coexist, alongside Homi Bhabha's cultural hybrid and third space theory. These theories helped me realise the complex role objects play in making sense of a family's migration stories, and enabled me to construct a location in the present for the presentation of my identity.

In my investigation, objects and my connections to them remained the consistent thematic anchors within a diverse set of exploratory modes of practice. Object studies, particularly the writings of Jane Bennett, helped in developing an understanding of how some objects hail us. Sherry Turkle and Svetlana Boym further expanded my ideas on objects to encompass their agency beyond passive, signified, or referent roles.

Detailed observational painting enabled me to elevate objects from a seemingly trivial status to one of significance. This meant I could connect to traditions of still life painting and establish a contemporary relevance to retelling narratives about objects in a realistic or *trompe l'oeil* manner. Multiple tests and material exploration proved that it is possible to use painting and textiles practices in combination to explore experiences related to migration, belonging and connection. I could combine the past with the present to create new objects, that were forward looking and optimistic.

At the time of writing this conclusion there was an exhibition in the Project Gallery at the National Gallery of Australia on Recycling and Remembering, showing how "the act of recovering discarded material has recently become a significant practice".[1] Two stand-out artists for me were Jessica Stockholder, who uses discarded domestic objects to make installations, and El Anatsui who re-imagines everyday materials into new forms. I did not discuss these artists in my exegesis as they were outside the scope of my project, but now I would like to pursue the ideas of sustainability further. In fact, it has become one of my main points of focus: I will continue to rescue items from opportunity shops and resuscitate them in different ways. With Jane Bennett's theories of objects and sustainability in mind, I will create work that speaks about material culture, infusing personal stories with a broader outlook on our understandings and uses of everday objects.

1 National Gallery of Australia wall label, Project Gallery, 2018.

Implications for further practice and research

My research has wider reaching implications, in particular in education and community outreach.

During my candidature I worked with the National Museum of Australia to design a deliver a drawing program for children that related to an exhibition from the British Museum, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. Children brought in their special objects and I showed them ways to draw and document them, on a 1 to 1 scale, using coloured pencils and markers. My gouache paintings *Taxonomy of Teijo* and *Taxonomy of Elmi* along with the real objects, were displayed to inspire the participants. The program was called 'A History of You.' Images of the children's drawings were digitised and displayed on the Museum's website. It is easy to envisage further development of this approach. For example, in community outreach involving people who have recently migrated to Australia. Using special objects in an innovative way can aid an understanding of loss and recuperation and seems a potentially valuable objective in further developing the methods and themes covered in the practice-led research.

There is also some significance for my research for collaboration on museum collections. With the following questions in mind: What new information or stories could be gleaned from creating disparate groupings of objects from existing collections and documenting them as paintings and embroideries? What sort of alternative views and stories could I curate? What could the painting process reveal that might have otherwise gone unnoticed?

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The Under Glow, (detail) 84 pieces, oil on panel 250cm x 250cm 2018


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